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ABSTRACT

Community responses to the problem of declining school enrollments form the central focus of this volume. Describing how a number of communities have dealt with the controversy associated with school closings, mergings, and program cutbacks, the book seeks to benefit other communities facing similar situations. It begins by describing the "typical" power struggle that often ensues when a school board decides to deal with rising costs and declining enrollments by closing a number of schools. It describes the disadvantages parents and other community groups face in such a situation, especially in regard to information availability. The book also explores how racial overtones are often present because of the inclination to close the older, dilapidated schools usually found in the poorer sections of town. The book underscores the need for the community and school board to work together rather than at cross-purposes. Six case studies report on how both rural and urban school districts have faced school closings and so describe events in two small Iowa communities: Salt Lake City: Skokie, Illinois: the San Francisco Bay Area: Lexington, Massachusetts: and Boston, Massachusetts. The final chapter gives suggestions on how citizens can develop their own sophisticated and informed strategies for dealing with the technical and political dimensions of declining enrollment. (Author/DS)

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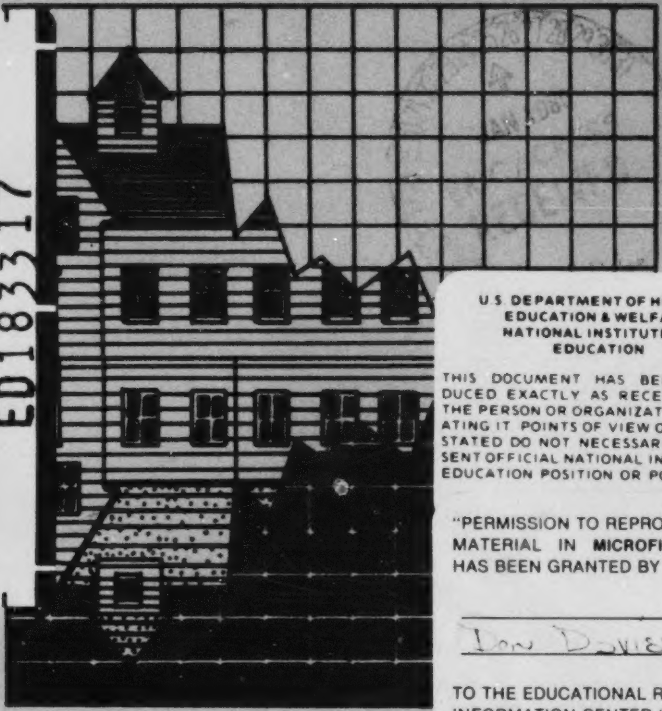

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An Institute for Responsive Education
Report on Community Responses to
Declining Enrollment

RC 011836

RISING ABOVE DECLINE

Betsy Wachtel and Brian Powers

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us. . .

Charles Dickens
A Tale of Two Cities

For this time of crisis to yield fruit, we must use it as a time to explore new meanings of old goals and values; to recognize and reconcile conflicting claims and interests; to invent replacements for structures and mechanisms that have proved inequitable for our people and inadequate for their future.

Miriam Clasby

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Preface

This volume, made possible by a grant from the Rockefeller Family Fund, can be read in several different ways. First, and most directly, it documents ways in which several communities have dealt with the problem of declining school enrollments. Each of the case studies outlines some type of public participation in the task of adjusting to population changes and fiscal pressures. The materials, addressed to a lay audience, are specifically designed to illumine citizen experiences so that others in similar situations may benefit. The purpose of the volume, then, is both modest and manageable.

At a more general level, however, the materials surface some fundamental issues of schooling in contemporary America. Decisions on school retrenchment call for specific answers to basic questions about education: who gets what kind of instruction? at what cost? and who pays? These are enduring questions in any society, and the ways in which they are answered tell us much about the fabric of its life. The debates and discussions reported here provide firsthand evidence on the range of values and interests articulated by citizens as the grounds for their decisions; they also serve as indicators of their levels of political, social and economic awareness.

Similarly, the materials highlight fundamental issues of decision-making in a democratic society. The various local procedures used to make public choices represent answers to another basic question: who decides? The formal and informal mechanisms described here tell us something about the problems of and potential for representing various citizen interests in a manner which also affirms constitutional values of justice and equity.

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The focused case studies, therefore, also serve as vignettes of decision-making in a democratic society illustrating substance (who gets what kind of instruction?); rationales (on what grounds are choices made?); and process (who decides these things?). This combination of the practical and the probing fully reflects the mission of the Institute for Responsive Education as a non-profit organization founded to increase citizen participation in educational decision-making.

During the various stages of the undertaking, project directors Betsy Wachtel and Brian Powers conducted more than 100 telephone and personal interviews and studied the existing literature and newspaper accounts of community responses to enrollment decline. Their efforts were strongly supported by the enthusiasm and skill of the reporters responsible for the case studies. Special thanks are due to IRE editor Nancy Seymour for her careful and insightful editing as she shepherded the manuscript through its many drafts. We would also like to thank Don Davies for his constructive suggestions, Jane deGroot for her thoughtful editorial assistance, Deborah Smith for her patient proofreading, and Dana Rudolph and Constance M. Hyde for their technical assistance.

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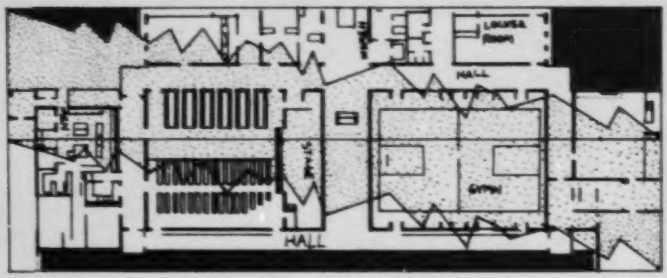

INTRODUCTION: FITTING SCHOOLS TO FEWER STUDENTS

Brian Powers

A former research associate at the Institute for Responsive Education, Powers is a native of Massachusetts now studying sociology at the University of California in Berkeley. His interests are in the politics of education and the ways parents and citizens can organize effective challenges to bureaucratic management of schools and other social institutions.

Across the country, in nearly every big city and its suburbs, and even in relatively isolated rural areas, communities and their schools have debated policy changes, innovations and cutbacks as answers to declining enrollment.

Despite all the studies, planning and politicking over the past several years, there has been no discovery of a flawless route to innovative solutions to the problem. Elected school officials, educators, parents and citizens have been left to develop cautious, modest adjustments in school district programs. Their achievements have been painful and based on trial and error, because declining enrollment is a problem few people expected and for which few are prepared. Now the sentiment is growing that a systematic approach to long-range planning is needed, with a perspective that takes a sweeping and incisive look at what the schools offer now and what they should offer in the future. Citzens' and parents' growing interest in the governance of schools has begun to open the door for their involvement in the planning process.

The five chapters of this book review the efforts of school officials and the public in different communities to develop their own best solutions to the problems created by declining student enrollment. These accounts of success and set-back alike dramatize not only the enormous technical problems that have been faced but, even more important, the political complications which must be addressed.

This book shows communities attempting to turn declining enrollment into a rare occasion for improving the educational services available in a community. It depicts them trying, against severe odds, to save what they value most from the economizer's axe. The stories testify to the resolve of parents and citizens to use this problem as a valuable opportunity to reassess educational goals, and act on their judgments, so that students and their communities become the beneficiaries, not the victims, of decline.

One way to introduce these chapters and illustrate declining enrollment's complexities is to describe the sequence of events typical in many communities that have begun to wrestle with this unfamiliar issue. From this typical community's experience can be drawn lessons for all concerned with making positive, constructive adjustments in schools with decisive population changes. A composite description of the pattern of events likely to occur with declining enrollment will help highlight the actual problems and issues encountered by the citizens described in this book.

In most communities, the first sign of a population drop is in preschool programs or kindergarten enrollment. For a year or two or so, enrollment fluctuations might be considered normal. But, at some point, the school district realizes that enrollment decline is becoming a trend. Sensing the worst, the school board or administration typically orders the preparation of enrollment projections for at least five years. In order to make policy, the district officials have to know the number of students that will be attending schools and what their educational needs will be. Enrollment projections can be highly valuable planning tools if they reflect current local conditions as well as future potential for community change. But in this typical school district, the worrisome, dismaying fact is that the accuracy of these projections as well as the board's assumptions about the entire community's future profile are destined to become a point of controversy.

The enrollment projections confirm the administration's and school board's fears: the school system is losing its population steadily and chances of an increase over the next few years are slim. This information in hand, school officials agree to study possible changes in a district that has been outfitted for more students than it will probably ever again enroll. The objective of the study is to design policies that will close some schools, reduce school staff and save money.

Closing schools, reducing staff and saving money form the triad of policies that inevitably surfaces when a district is faced with a dwindling population. It is important to stress that not every district responds by envisioning these as the only alternatives. There have been occasions when a school system sits back to reflect on how to reorganize itself from the ground up, taking advantage of the slack space and lower ratios of students to teachers to introduce long-desired improvements. But, because most districts have come under unprecedented pressure to justify seemingly inflated budgets, the advantages of declining enrollment are clouded by a sense of financial crisis. With a financial rationale for its trio of objectives, the school board and administration must next decide how to bring about money-saving, belt-tightening changes and inform their constituency of their line of attack.

The board usually names an advisory committee of prominent and responsible citizens to assist delegates from the central school administration in planning for declining enrollment. While such committees generally are given guidelines from the school board or central administration, the official charge to such an advisory group is somewhat open-ended. Committees are usually asked to explore ways a school district should redraw attendance boundaries to ensure adequate enrollment in school buildings, freeing up the facilities most "underutilized" for eventual closings. Another task often is determining which programs at the secondary and elementary levels could be eliminated without harming the overall quality of education. Similarly, committees might be asked to decide which indirect school services, such as libraries or health screenings, could be picked up by other public or private agencies.

Although committees' tasks may vary, school boards almost always clarify the committees' authority as only advisory to the legally elected or appointed educational authorities. The recommendations of these committees carry no official clout. To cite from one school board resolution forming a citizens' advisory committee on declining enrollment:

> Although the Board of Education recognizes and shall continue to exercise its legal and policy-making responsibilities, it shall grant to the committee complete autonomy of operation with the understanding that the committee's relationship with the Board of Education shall be strictly advisory, with final decisions regarding its findings and recommendations remaining with the Board of Education.

The advisory committee then goes to work, forming subcommittees, arranging a common timetable and accumulating the information necessary to develop policy recommendations. As with any advisory group, the validity of the committee's recommendations and decisions depends greatly on the quality of the information it is able to gather and the questions it asks about the value and effectiveness of educational programs accepted by the community.

Because these committees are often composed of people in occupations outside the field of education, it is inevitable that they rely on school department professionals for direction. It is at this juncture that the school administration's leadership style, community sensitivity and political acumen influence the work of the advisory committee. Professional administrators usually end up playing a firm and controlling role in the preparation of advisory committee recommendations. Official school department influence over the work of a supposedly autonomous advisory committee develops as professionals provide committees with help on technical aspects of policy making like budget analysis, program evaluation, facilities surveys and personnel policies; they also, indirectly or otherwise, shape the committee's philosophy and approach to its task. The almost inescapable dependence of committee members on the experience and training of technical experts makes it likely that they will absorb the educators' values about what schools can realistically and possibly do. In a typical district, community participation is not so open-ended and autonomous as professional and school board members profess to believe.

Although there have been cases where advisory committee members have shown great independence, going beyond the official charge they have been given and suggesting more penetrating changes in the school district than expected, most complete their work by submitting a set of recommendations that reflects the school board's priorities and approach.

After several months of working with little communication with the public or the press, the typical advisory committee presents it recommendations on declining enrollment to the school board for consideration. It proposes that the school system:

- Close several elementary schools that have lost 25 to 30 percent of their enrollment.
- Increase class size throughout the entire school district.
- Eliminate advanced electives and enrichment courses in the secondary schools.
- Move the ninth grade to the high school and the sixth grade to the junior high schools, to be termed middle schools.
- Hire no new teachers or specialists.
- Make preparations for letting all non-tenured teachers go and inform staff that some tenured teaching positions will be eliminated in the future.
- Prepare a flexible transfer policy for teachers in the system.
- Reduce the extra-curricular and athletic program budget.

- Bring together the parents and community groups connected with schools to be closed with parents and community groups involved with schools absorbing new teachers.
- Study the options open to the district for dealing with the real estate left vacant from consolidating schools.

The school board accepts the report, stressing that the committee appears to have done its best with a difficult problem in such strained and difficult times. The board indicates that the remedies appear to be reasonable. But, before voting on them, it decides to hold a public meeting to inform the community of its plan and to solicit reactions from the people affected by the proposals. For the first time, details of the advisory committee recommendations are given to the press.

The first gusts of controversy blow through the public hearing. Parents and neighbors of several of the elementary schools targeted for closing appear at the meeting organized and ready to fight. They are accompanied by secondary school parents, by some groups of secondary school students and by representatives of the teachers' organization. Placards with slogans supporting the elementary schools dot the walls of the meeting room. Teachers, worried about their jobs and mindful of the relationships they have built up with parents and students, talk quietly and seriously with small groups of parents. The students, concerned about losing electives and extra-curricular activities, are prepared to deliver petitions signed by their classmates to the school board. The climate of the meeting is tense from the start.

In a typical school district hearing, many parents will have a hard time getting on the agenda to speak about their concerns. When they can get the floor, their speaking time will be limited. For its part, the school board is surprised to see the large crowd in the meeting room and is taken aback by the resistance to its advisory committee's recommendations. Board members had expected simply to explain the proposals, answer a few questions about them, and move on to planning a schedule for carrying out the approved plan.

The parents, neighbors and students are angry, however, and they have come with some facts and figures to challenge the officials' proposals; they are determined to save their schools. They have arranged for certain people to make forceful, emotional appeals to the school board. More often than not, however, the citizen groups will be at a disadvantage in arguing their cases to school officials. They will have had little time to develop their arguments and gather support. They will not have the same kind of information that the advisory committee had in making its recommendations.

The animosity builds as the meeting begins. The school board is urged to exempt each school slated for closing. Parents stress each building's special after-school program that keeps children off the streets. Parents and teachers alike stress the high quality of instruction and the good morale among teachers in each building. Speakers emphasize the success of students enrolled in advanced courses and other elective subjects when they argue against cutbacks at the secondary level. Parents often have no idea whether their children will suffer or profit if they attend ninth grade at the high school instead of at the junior high. Sixth-grade parents are worried that 11 year olds are too young to adjust successfully to the demands of a junior high school. Parents angrily want to know what it will mean educationally to rearrange grade levels in the high school and junior high school.

Different arguments are heard for closing down buildings. If the school is large and modern, it is said to be superlatively equipped to handle a school program and

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should not be vacated. If the school is old and small, it is said to be "homey," an important link to the community's own past that should not be eliminated.

Parents express great concern about the safety and welfare of children traveling to new schools on longer bus rides or on foot through unfamiliar neighborhoods. Some people suggest that the school system will spend more to transport children to new schools than it would if it just left the existing schools open.

People are worried about what will happen to the school buildings if they are shut down. Will they be used for something else? Will they be sold or rented? If they are left vacant, people say that they will become targets for vandals and that school grounds will become hangouts for idle bands of kids.

The school board feels swamped by this tide of objections to its policy. It diplomatically admits that some details remain to be worked out, but insists that the board would be financially irresponsible to the community if it did not take prompt action in response to the declining enrollment figures. The board explains that it has committed itself to making adjustments in the schools and will stand by its commitment. Turning to the specific objections of the parents, board members point out that an advisory committee of citizens, like those sitting in the audience, made the recommendations. They were not dreamed up by the school board overnight. Furthermore, the board insists, the advisory committee came to its conclusions using objective criteria: the capacity of the school, the number of students currently enrolled, the location and conditions of the school, and the costs of running and maintaining it.

Although most school board members speak sincerely, the parents will have none of their explanations. The meeting grows more rancorous and the chair finds it difficult to maintain order. Insults are traded, not just between the school board and the parent and citizen groups, but among the different school delegations themselves, which now see one another competitively.

Having accomplished little, the meeting breaks up. The community groups leave fuming, plotting new strategies, including public demonstations and even a court suit against the school board if it persists in its plans. The board itself, the administration and the advisory committee feel equally angry. They feel they have done their jobs well, and resent being the targets of opposition. They are convinced that people are intrinsically resistant to change and cannot see beyond their narrow interests. School officials speak ruefully about having to hold public hearings in compliance with the open meeting law and exposing themselves to the rhetoric of an ill-informed public.

In a large city, with racially, ethnically and economically distinct neighborhoods, other issues will arise in these public hearings. Research supports the common sense conclusion that the neighborhoods most affected by retrenchment plans are in fact the most vulnerable, the ones with the least political clout. The sad and outrageous fact is that schools slated to be closed and programs selected to be cut are often those serving poor or working-class White and minority people, who for years have been overlooked or poorly treated by official policies. Such groups and neighborhoods resent having been shortchanged by policies that allocated higher budgets, special programs, and better trained and more experienced personnel to other parts of the city.

It should also be kept in mind that so-called poverty neighborhoods often develop in older sections of a community. Schools and other municipal facilities are older and in greater disrepair than those in better serviced, more recently developed and more affluent sections of town. In many instances, school officials and advisory committees have found it convenient to use a change in student population as a reason for finally closing down outmoded, economically inefficient and tumbledown school buildings. It gives them a chance to equalize somewhat the distribution of educational benefits throughout the city, they maintain.

Such ideas sound reasonable, but in practice residents of certain locales, burdened by neglect of their needs and facilities, are again asked to quietly accept one more inconvenience that only indirectly benefits them. They are asked to contribute to the improvement of the educational resources of the entire city by giving up their nearby school. Such a burden seems especially hard to justify when a neighborhood school may well be the only facility providing city services to that particular area.

In cities or in smaller but nonetheless segregated communities, the public hearing on declining enrollment proposals is often the time when school officials are accused of racism or insensitivity to the special needs of low-income working families. However much school officals and advisory committee members may bristle at such charges, they must be reminded of the need for scrupulously developing equitable educational policies, with the neighborhoods' particular needs and past histories in mind.

Whether in a big city, a suburb, a town or a rural county, the conflict that erupts in a hearing room typically spills over into the community as neighbors band together, demonstrations occur and formerly competing school groups overlook their differences and start to work together. The thrust of their activity is to take the problem to the community and win widespread support for their proposal to start the planning process over again on a different basis.

Meanwhile, the school board tables the advisory committee's plans when it realizes the strong feelings the proposals have aroused in the community. Officials call for additional study of the plan and ask for review of the particular claims of the protestors. They insist that the delay in action is not a retreat and that something urgent must be done to solve the declining enrollment problem, but privately, board members start looking for ways to buy off some of the opposition and placate the rest.

The events that follow vary widely from one place to another. In some communities, master plans developed to reshape the school district for fewer students are sent back to the drawing board. In others, compromises leave school buildings with smaller enrollments open, but fill the excess space with other school department programs or even with city and social services programs. Some communities respond to public outcry over declining enrollment plans by doing nothing, waiting for an unlikely miracle to fill the schools with students again. In other places, after further study, districts ignore public sentiment and forge ahead with their original plans, closing schools, laying off staff and just barely saving some tax money.

As this book goes to print, it appears that most school districts are following the last course of action. The board votes to pursue its advisory committee's original recommendations and justifies its action in the name of economic necessity. It braces itself for the anger and resentment of the community. Its members face the next school board election with stiff upper lips, hoping that the public will forget the controversy in the voting booth.

This action occasionally leaves a school board facing costly lawsuits filed by parents who oppose its right to close their children's school or cut their children's programs. The board may also face other court challenges to its layoff (i.e., reduction in force) policy brought by individual teachers or by their union. The same board may find its optimism about closing schools premature because it cannot sell, lease or reuse a closed school building. The school stands vacant and vandalized, the object of neighbors' irritation as they calculate its negative effect on the market value of their houses and property.

Perhaps the school board's plan is eventually carried out smoothly, with no lingering opposition or lawsuits and with easy sales of property. Many people will still have considerably less confidence and faith in the integrity and democratic intentions of the board.

This account of a school district in crisis describes more true-to-life situations than most people would like to think. Portions of this typical story, if not all of it, can be seen by looking closely at events in one's own community or nearby. Newspapers have been fairly diligent in covering such controversies. Academic and administrative literature on declining enrollment and its controversies has begun to grow, but it is noteworthy that little emphasis is placed on the potential of declining enrollment to introduce new educational opportunities or bring the larger community into the decisionmaking process.

The Emerging Power Struggle

As recent events and the following case studies show, the public is now reluctant to accept changes developed by professionals or professionally-dominated committees in isolation from the community they serve. The public's resistance and the demands it has made signal a profound change in the political climate of education. The message is clear: changes in educational policy cannot be made without reference to community objectives and values.

Citizens have come to look questioningly at the generally accepted procedures creating educational policy.

As citizens participate in the process of deciding how their school system will make use of diminished resources for fewer students, they engage in a form of political action: not only are the plusses and minuses of a particular reform proposal weighed in a public forum, but the power of school authorities that enables them to administer schools using technical criteria which exclude the public is challenged.

Conflicts over school closings and program cuts are not instances of minor protest that reflect public ignorance about the financial and educational needs of a school system. They are not transitory explosions of sentimentalism. They should not be ignored. It is foolhardy to imagine that opponents of policies can simply be worn down. These controversies challenge the right and wisdom of officials making unilateral decisions in the name of the public interest. Moreover, they show the unwillingness of the public to accept token participation of citizens on committees dominated by school officials. Failure on all sides to recognize the power struggle built into declining enrollment controversies has inhibited the development of constructive policies for school change. Emotions arising out of the controversy may mask as well as reveal the deeper imbalance in decision-making power between administrators in authority and the public they serve.

In the past 50 to 80 years "conventional wisdom" and rapidly increasing student rolls encouraged the development of trained professionals—superintendents, central office administrators and school principals—to run the schools. Coincidentally, professionals widened their jurisdiction in policy making as well as in purely administrative matters. In the 1960's, a challenge to this professional domination arose in cities in the form of demands for community control. This challenge, while strongly resisted, continues in a variety of forms in rural areas and towns as well as in big cities.

In most school districts, however, professional domination by school boards and administrations prevails with only minor contributions by citizens to educational policy making. When declining enrollment appears, school officials have followed their traditional decision-making practices, excluding the public and tailoring school systems to new demographic realities by closing buildings, reducing staff, and making financial cutbacks. These concrete and visible changes show that declining enrollment policies cannot respond to educational issues in technical terms only.

Declining enrollment forces a reexamination of the traditional assumptions about the purpose of schooling, the function of schools, the means of financing schools, and the relationship among school officials, educational programs and the community. Population changes require a rethinking of educational goals, not the implementation of piecemeal adaptations which, in the end, preserve a shrunken version of the educational status quo. While there will always be controversies surrounding proposed changes, the conflicts could be less self-defeating for the community if citizens were involved in the planning process which determined criteria for cutbacks or other changes from the beginning. Once educational goals have been determined, with contributions from the community, administrators and others charged with managing the school system on a day-to-day basis may use their technical expertise to carry out specific policies efficiently and effectively.

Successful Citizen Involvement

Citizens who have been successful in shaping declining enrollment plans acknowledge that the complex realities of running a school system require the services of professionally trained experts. For the most part, they have matched the notions from school department professionals and experts with well-informed independently developed counter-proposals. How do participants, many of whom are dealing with complex educational issues for the first time, achieve this sophistication? There is no easy recipe. People have worked very hard exploring and proposing solutions to their community's declining enrollment problems. They have formed study groups representing the variety of community interests to ferret out the reasons for decline and gather a wealth of information about the school system and the community. Such groups have examined all facets and alternatives to the problem in long-range, locally-based terms. They have shown a willingness to work with school administrators provided that their good faith is reciprocated.

Avoiding the cynicism prevalent in school department planning programs, successful citizen groups have approached their task with the assumption that, while declining enrollment may necessitate deep changes in the school system, these changes can produce tangible benefits for students. They have examined the system's goals and effectiveness, seeking the means to strengthen the quality of education and, contrary to much of the talk in educational circles, they have not shied from innovation.

Successful citizen groups have recognized that school systems are often profoundly affected by factors quite separate from education. They have come to appreciate that economic realities like a shrinking tax base or inflation require school policies to reflect a commitment to cost effectiveness. An appreciation of the way the economy at large affects school finances has enabled many involved private citizens to show angry taxpayers that education is a victim of larger social trends. While it cannot be excused from the requirement to tighten its institutional belt, a school system can be seen as offering a distinctive set of valuable services for which a community is willing to pay realistic costs, even in a situation of enrollment decline and financial squeeze.

In a number of cases, the success of citizens has been hastened along by the support of sympathetic people who have expertise in such areas as management, education, child development, community development, real estate, transportation, law and politics. Such experts have been found working in community service agencies, in various branches and levels of government, in private business, in research institutions, in colleges, universities and high schools, and even in the school department itself. Often these resource people live in the community and, as parents, taxpayers or voters, have a direct interest in seeing their school system operate effectively but sensitively with regard to community goals.

The combined skills of shrewd citizen activists and sympathetic professionals have helped point out weaknesses, fallacies and injustices in school department plans. Suggestions on how citizens can develop their own sophisticated and informed strategies for dealing with the technical and political dimensions of declining enrollment are given in the conclusion to this book.

The case studies included here reflect the urban, suburban and rural diversity of the nation. They also explore issues such as desegregation, tax reduction pressures and legal requirements for budget limitations which exacerbate the problems arising from enrollment decline. If school boards and administrations engage the entire community in addressing these realities and in reexamining the goals of education, they might well advance toward creating a system which responds not only to present constraints of money and population, but also to the needs and goals of their various constituencies—students, parents, teachers and others in the community.

SELF DETERMINATION FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

Robert E. Skenes and Carolyn I. Carlyle

Robert E. Skenes and Carolyn I. Carlyle, a husband-and-wife team, live and work in Columbia, Maryland. Skenes earned his Ph.D. in human communication and organizational change. He has helped develop and manage two open learning programs. In addition to writing, lecturing and doing research on fulfilling kinds of organizations, he offers workshops in creative problem solving and in clarifying goals and practices for schools, businesses and other groups. Carlyle has a Ph.D. in human communication and is currently writing and doing workshops in interpersonal communication and creative problem solving through imaging.

Sprawling across the horizon in gentle green swells, the land of north central Iowa, once covered by six foot high prairie grass, is now dotted by manicured farms and small towns. Two island communities, separated by one hundred and twenty miles of earthly ocean, fight the problem of declining enrollment with different strategies. They are the CAL Community and Lohrville School Districts.

CAL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

In 1950, the three tiny rural farm towns of Coulter, Alexander and Latimer combined to form the CAL Community School District. The district covers some of Iowa's richest farmlands. Its economic base is agricultural and the community's few businesses depend on the farmers' prosperity. Estimates are that the district has per capita income of about $13,000. About 670 families live there and, of these, 198 have children in school. The district's school, housed in a single building, accommodates 332 students in grades K-12. It sits at the edge of Latimer, a peaceful village of just-mowed lawns and meticulously cared for homes. CAL parents, many of whom are college-educated, value education and are actively involved with the programs their school offers.

CAL Superintendent, Dr. James Jess, is a soft- but outspoken diplomat who knows what he and his district want: it is not the reorganization desired by the state. Under the banner of increased efficiency, CAL and other small rural school districts face pressure from the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to reorganize or consolidate with one or more neighboring school districts.

In 1975, when an inflexible budget set at the state level was strangling the CAL district, Jess mobilized 200 people in one week's time to march on the state capital in support of a local enrichment tax option. The tax, subsequently passed, allows districts to raise a limited amount of extra money locally for operation of their school programs. Again, in 1977, when the legislature was considering mandatory reorganization of small districts, 300 people from the area joined another 700 Iowans to successfully protest the bill.

Jess believes his leadership helped set the tone for political action, but he also believes the community is strong enough to forge, on its own, a political unity aimed at keeping its school. He argues that "efficiency of school district operations must be determined not only by the question, 'What does it cost?' but also by another, 'What are we getting for our money?'" Dr. Robert Benton, Superintendent of Iowa's Department of Public Instruction (DPI), has told Jess, "The General Assembly is more interested in 'dollar efficiency' than student outcomes."[1]

This debate is not merely intellectual; it reflects a continuing struggle by residents across the district to maintain control of their community's school. (As recently as the 1950's, there were nearly 2,000 school districts in Iowa; after state-mandated consolidation, however, less than 500 districts remained.)

The Iowa Foundation Plan

Much of the current struggle between small rural districts and the DPI and state legislature grows out of the Iowa Foundation Plan, passed by the legislature in 1971 to equalize the dollars available to rich and poor school districts. This plan took budget-setting powers away from local boards, set a maximum annual per pupil expenditure and supplemented local district property tax revenues with state funds to equalize expenditures.

Jess feels the Foundation Plan dictates "equal dollars for unequal problems," and that it is not working "because of an unanticipated large decline in enrollment and an unusually high rate of inflation." He comments further, "Tying a controlled budget to a school's enrollment—whether it is done on a one-to-one ratio or a weighted factor concept—will not work because there are 450 different districts, 450 different spending patterns and 450 unique and different financial problems." Jess would like the legislature to "give the districts back their local control and provide a foundation base that is fair and equal to all."

Jess does not oppose richer districts helping poorer ones but, like many other rural superintendents in Iowa, he feels pinched by the Foundation Plan for two reasons: his district has been experiencing declining enrollment and, the communities in his district value their school so highly that, if permitted, they would gladly spend more money to maintain it.

From 1972 to 1978, the district's enrollment fell from 444 to 332. Had CAL had 112 more students in 1978, the district would have received more than $197,000 in additional annual revenue. By 1975, the district had eliminated eight teaching positions by not rehiring; it had also reduced custodial, kitchen and transportation personnel, dropped bus routes and closed a building housing the middle school.

Paradoxically, the school's declining enrollment results at least partly from its district's prosperity. As larger and larger farms have become more manageable, smaller farms have been bought up by larger, more mechanized ones, so families and students have transferred out of the area. Yet, Coulter, Alexander and Latimer firmly support their local school and want it to remain and prosper.

In 1975, when the legislature passed the enrichment bill permitting voters in local districts to raise their taxes by an amount limited to five percent of the state average expenditure per pupil times their enrollment, CAL was the first district to pass the measure. An overwhelming 87 percent of the voters wanted to take advantage of the opportunity provided by their march on the State House. Still, this only raised an additional $22,940 for the 1976-1977 school year. Earlier, 72 percent of CAL's voters had demonstrated their support by approving a two-and-a-half mill schoolhouse fund levy to maintain, equip and repair the school building.

Strong Community Support

Much of the CAL community's willingness to support its school grew out of its easy access to the school board. With wry wit and a gravelly laugh, CAL school board president George Richards explains, "When I came on to the board, the first thing we did was start the CAL-O-GRAM newsletter. I had been frustrated so many times in the past trying to find out what was going on in the school. 'It's none of your business' was what I'd get. Now everything's in the CAL-O-GRAM, whatever the board discusses, unless it's executive session or personnel. We've tried to be open with the community, and they've responded beautifully." Jess agrees that the policy of open communication, established before he came, has helped him in keeping people informed and in keeping in touch with their responses and ideas.

CAL's administration also ascertains its community's desires and feelings through community surveys. The most recent survey was completed in the fall of 1975 and another one is now in preparation. In 1975, 670 forms were distributed. Fifty-one percent of the community as a whole completed surveys and 78 percent of the CAL parents responded. More than 75 percent of the general public and parents said that the school keeps them well-informed and emphasizes the same values as the community. A similar percentage also indicated that they are proud of CAL students, staff and facilities; they also feel that the school is spending their tax dollars wisely.

Respondents were emphatic in their feelings about the worth of their school. Over 88 percent of the parents and 76 percent of the public said they "would vote to increase local taxes to maintain CAL's present educational program." Ninety-six percent of the parents and 88 percent of the public did *not* feel that CAL should reorganize or consolidate. A full 98 percent of the parents and 93 percent of the general public felt "small class sizes are an advantage even though they are more expensive." On the question of school size, over 80 percent of the parents and general public did *not* think that a "school with a total enrollment of 275-300 is too small," and 98 percent of parents and 93 percent of the general public disagreed that a "high school enrollment between 600 and 1500 students is realistic for rural Iowa."

Both the CAL-O-GRAM and the community survey reflect the administration's concern with the district's residents' goals and desires. CAL's administration reports to and actively seeks out information from the community.

Parent Involvement

The CAL School District goes far beyond newsletters and surveys in engaging its public. It involves them in the life of the school in many different ways. Secondary school principal, Jeff Sales, notes:

> What makes CAL a fantastic place to work is that the parents want their school and are proud of their school. They're interested in providing a good education for their children.

Parents are encouraged to participate in the actual operation of the school. Many volunteer in the classroom and serve on various advisory committees—Title 1, Preschool, Vocational and Adult Education.

The Preschool Advisory Board is a fairly structured form of parent participation in school programs. Started privately in 1970, the advisory board-directed preschool program was incorporated into the CAL district during 1975 and became a public service available at no cost. The administration had hoped to bolster enrollment figures by including preschool students; it took on the program with the understanding that the DPI would support the preschool as part of the public school. The administration even received a directive from the DPI that children must be enrolled by a certain date in order to be included in per pupil funding totals. Later, however, the DPI said the directive was mistaken and no money would be forthcoming for preschools. Thus, CAL was left with another program for its already shrinking budget to support. The people seemed to want the program, however, so the district supported it.

The advisory board concept has been retained and the preschool's board now includes six parents, the teacher and an administrator. The board selects its own members, two of whom come from each of the three communities. Members serve two-year terms which rotate so that there are three new board members every year.

Parents on the advisory board and other advisory committees develop program objectives, review implementation and evaluate outcomes. They also choose new equipment and materials, and assist in home visits and registrations. Advisory board members act as liaisons with parents and listen to their ideas and feelings. Every year they organize a day-long districtwide workshop on issues concerning young children.

Jess points out that one of the big advantages of small schools is that they do not require elaborate structures to ensure parent impact on the school. Parents feel free to suggest changes informally. They are familiar enough with the situation and people involved that they are not shy about following up on programs. Because they have no need to organize politically to affect the administration, they have more energy to support the school and help in its day-to-day operations.

Carol Lubkeman, coordinator of the Parent Volunteer Program and a parent volunteer herself, comments:

> Most parents are aware of the problems that our school faces with declining enrollment, and if we, as volunteers, can aid in any way, we are all determined enough to do it. The teachers give you such a good response, and you feel so welcome and needed. Who doesn't want to feel needed? Especially when you're here on a non-paying basis. I've always gotten much more in return than I've ever given.

Most volunteers spend a half to a full day per week in the school doing clerical work or tutoring. Elementary teacher Jean Wurster says, "I like to have parent volunteers work with children if they can." She notes that parents often can "come in and give boosts to children when a teacher doesn't have enough time." For example, one of her students was having difficulties in reading, and Wurster had a parent volunteer read with her two times a week. "The child has blossomed this year. She's a joy to see, and she's thrilled with herself."

CAL's Programs

The Parent Volunteer Program is just one of many people-oriented programs in this school of 363 students (132 students in grades 9-12, 95 in grades 5-8, and 136 in PreK-4). Other programs include adult education, senior citizens as resource people in high school classes, Title 1 reading and math, learning disabilities, freshman reading class and a unique approach to working with gifted and talented students.

Senior citizens are now getting more attention in CAL. The state has developed a plan allowing them to pay a dollar for courses for which local districts provide the facilities. The school has a Senior Citizens' Day when the elderly are invited to spend the day and eat lunch with the students. In addition, some teachers bring senior citizens into their history and humanities classes to share with young people their memories of what the world was like when they were growing up.

In addition to the by-now standard Title 1 and learning disabilities programs found in most schools, CAL has two somewhat unusual programs. One is a reading course for freshmen. Secondary school principal Sales notes:

> There are very few schools around here that do anything with the secondary student and his reading problems. So many times, we take care of them in the elementary grades, but when they get to high school, there's nothing done. If they can't read, they're lost. We require this course of all freshmen to try to build up their speed, comprehension and vocabulary.

The other unique program is Project CARE. CARE (CAL Academic Resource Enrichment) is an elegantly simple and potent program offered chiefly for academically talented students, but open to anyone interested in participating who can keep up with his or her regular school work. Mick West, the intense young teacher with twinkling eyes who initiated the program, explains:

> I'm kind of like a resource person. Students tell me what they're studying in classes and then we try to match things to their interests. We're not trying to work with weaknesses and make them better. That's not what CARE's all about. We recognize that they're good in some areas, and we work with those.

By providing a framework for students to initiate studies in their own areas of interest, CARE stands out from more traditional approaches to learning; and its students handle the freedom well. West says:

> We've taken a lot of our students' projects to other schools for workshops, and people are amazed to see what they've done, but our kids aren't unique—they're great kids, and I love them—but everybody has an interest or a talent if people will just work with it.

That a small school with a tight budget chooses to individualize to the degree illustrated by Project CARE may be somewhat unusual, but it is characteristic of CAL. People at CAL are committed to academic excellence through individual attention and developing the students' sense of self worth.[3]

In addition to these programs, CAL offers what Jess and others view as a strong overall program. The approximately 130 high school students have traditional academic classes in language arts, speech, math, geometry, algebra, biology, physics chemistry, physiology, physical geography, American government and world history. The business sequence provides shorthand, typing, business law, bookkeeping and office practice. Also available are shop courses—metalwork, woodworking, industrial arts, auto repair. Future farmers can choose from courses like farm management, animal science, crops and soils. Home economics students have options like housing or marriage and family. Spicier offerings in this rather traditional bill-of-fare include creative writing, humanities, mass media, ethnic literature, foundations of art, ceramics, crafts, vocal music, band, German I & II and Spanish I & II. (Foreign languages are offered as part of a cooperative venture with other schools in the area.)

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What CAL can't offer, Jess tries to get through the local community college. For example, if a few students want an exotic vocational education course, the cost cannot be justified. With the area community college coordinating the program, however, it becomes economically feasible because several schools can take advantage of it. (Such cooperative ventures may well suggest an alternative to the state's single-minded rush for consolidation.)

CAL students test well generally, ranking in the 80th to 90th percentile on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Educational Development. A 1970-1974 study showed that 60 percent of the high school graduates attend college or other institutions of higher learning, 18 percent go directly into farming and 22 percent are otherwise employed. Less than one-half of one percent are unemployed, and less than one-half of one percent drop out.

Parents want the things CAL gives their children. They want good, sound educational programs; they want opportunities for their children to participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities; and, they want their children to receive individual attention from their teachers and to be personally known in their schools. Jess is providing an expanded concept of schools as lifelong learning centers that can bring all age groups together and affirm feelings of community.

Defending Small Schools

Faced with the pinch of declining enrollment, first responses often focus on consolidation or centralization into larger units. Jess's action research has turned him into an effective defender of small schools. In his review of Jonathan Sher's and Rachel Tompkins' report, "Economy, Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of

Rural School District Consolidation,"[3] Jess sums up the authors' conclusion:

> Consolidation was a panacea that wasn't needed. They found that none of its selling points—greater economy, efficiency and equality—held up under the scrutiny of their research findings.

Jess also states that his own research findings "would support a reorganization movement aimed at *decentralization* of larger units so that they can experience more of the favorable qualities characteristic of smaller districts."

Contrasting centralized approaches with more democratic ones, Jess asserts:

> As society has moved toward centralized decision-making, a centralized decision-making agency is telling us what we need for everybody. We have to start looking at *differences* in terms of what parents want for their kids. Policy makers are saying small schools are inadequate, that you can't provide a quality education with a school district this size. We're saying we can. But we're putting an awful lot of time and effort into proving something that doesn't need to be proven. If people want it, they should have it![4]

CAL people are not trying to tell others what to do or what is best for their situation. CAL merely wants to be guaranteed the right to determine its own educational goals and means. Jess says:

> The big argument that we're making is not that we're better than somebody else, but that we can do the job *here*. Because we aren't as big as somebody else doesn't mean that we can't provide a good education. For years we've been told that bigger is better, and all of a sudden

> some people are fighting back and saying, 'Hey, that isn't the case.' And so, we're showing some of those qualities that are good about our system. Our main argument is that people should have the right to *choose* the type of school setting they want their children to go into. The state, in turn, should not hamper our ability to do that.

In his doctoral research,[5] Jess compared the quality of education received in larger school districts with that received in smaller ones in terms of student outcomes. In contrast to smaller districts, he found:

> Larger district size and greater number of course units offered were found to correlate negatively to variables of quality educational output. Schools offering more units characteristically had higher percentages of dropouts; lower levels of student satisfaction with the help they receive from their teachers and the personal interest their teachers show in them as individuals; lower levels of parent satisfaction with their children's opportunities in extra-curricular activities; and, lower parent willingness to vote increased taxes to support their schools.

Smaller schools had "higher graduate productivity in terms of employment and graduates going on to post-secondary schools." He found little difference in standardized student achievement scores.

One of those parents who consciously chose a small school is Carol Lubkeman. Both she and her husband are CAL graduates who moved to an urban area to work. When they began raising a family, however, they decided to return to a rural setting. She explains:

> I guess a small school was the basis for our coming back to this area. To me, it's a necessity for my children to attend a small school. The good feelings you have about

> yourself as an individual, I think, are a number one priority. Thinking to yourself, 'I think I can, and I'm going to try'—that's number one. Individual help, individual concern, familiar faces, having more than one teacher know you, short transportation on a bus, security are important to me. If you can come from this school feeling secure about yourself, then wherever you go, you're not afraid to try.

The Outlook

In spite of all this supporting data, Jess finds that, in some years:

> I still spend as much as 60 percent of my time compiling data, preparing arguments and making presentations in support of our school's program to legislators, members of the School Budget Review committee, school authorities and interested citizens in an effort to show the limitations the finance formula has imposed on our district since 1971.

CAL has already cut its salary budget by approximately $160,000 since 1971. It has cut an additional $20,000 by closing a building and eliminating certain bus routes. So far, however, staff layoffs have been practically nil. Instead, positions simply were not refilled as they became vacant. As a result, many staff perform in varied roles—the French teacher teaches speech, math teachers teach language arts, science or gym, and the art teacher teaches humanities.

School board president George Richards has restrained hopes that there may be light around the next bend in CAL's tunnel. He says:

> I'm not optimistic about growth in the foreseeable future. I am optimistic that the legislature is going to allow *us* to raise what money we feel is necessary to run

> our school. We're not asking the state or federal government for money. I think there's been quite a change in the attitude of legislature this past session. Before, you heard nothing but 'force them to reorganize' or 'starve them to death until they have to reorganize,' and this seemed to be the policy. But last year they were shaken a little by the appearance of so many parents. We must have taken 300 or more from this community down to that hearing. There were over 1,000 people from this region that went to that hearing. The legislators have never had such a large group come in for a committee hearing, and it shook 'em up. They're still talking about it.

PURE: A COALITION TO RESIST CONSOLIDATION

Two Iowa farm women, Joyce Losure and Janet Kinney, were among the 1000 people protesting mandatory consolidation at the Iowa State House in February 1977. The protestors agreed, says Losure, "that it would be great if we were organized to do something for our children and our communites." By April, Losure and Kinney had formed a nucleus of 16 people; among them was James Jess, who now says:

> The reason I jumped on the bandwagon for PURE is that we as a district alone could not accomplish much. Our needs are very similar to a lot of school districts' needs, but we had to be representative of much more of Iowa if we were going to do anything. So when the opportunity to help develop an organization like PURE arose, we were ready to go. Now, rather than representing one district, we are representing over 200 districts that have membership in PURE. Politically, we have much more clout.

By November, this group had produced a newsletter and gained a membership of 1000. The organization's name states its purpose clearly: People United for Rural Education (PURE).

PURE members insist that local communities have the right to decide if, when and how they reorganize instead of being force-fed state plans for consolidation. They also believe they should have the right not to consolidate and that their program and budget should not be hampered by inflexible regulations laid down by the state. PURE advocates more representation and concern for small schools on state educational and financial committees and on advisory councils.

Its leaders see PURE as a vehicle for mobilizing the grassroots and developing political pressure that cannot be ignored. They spend much of their time politicking; they use newsletters, lobbying and reports on legislation as their tools. The monthly newsletter goes to members, state legislators, superintendents and school board members. It carries articles about the benefits of small schools and local control, quality programs in small schools and related school finance and legislative issues.

PURE is a group of self-trained lobbyists, at least one of whom, sometimes three or four, are present when the legislature is in session. Members also sit in on committee and subcommittee meetings throughout the year. Three bills harmonious with PURE's goals passed the Iowa legislature during 1978, encouraging Losure to believe the PURE is coming into its own as a political force.

In addition to focusing attention and energy on the political process, PURE members speak to local and regional groups. In February 1978, PURE sponsored a two-day convention on the problems and potential of rural education. In his preface to the Convention Report, Jess wrote, "Over 350 educators, school board members, parents, state and national organization leaders, state and regional education agency personnel, college and university faculty and legislators" attended the conference in Des Moines. People came from 13 states. Since then, Jess and others in PURE have been invited to other states to speak on alternatives to consolidation.

PURE achieved national recognition in the spring of 1978 when it was selected as one of nine national winners (out of a field of 700) for the 1977 National Volunteer Activist Award. (Sponsored by the Germaine Monteil Cosmetiques corporation and the National Center for Voluntary Action, the awards are presented as part of a national effort to recognize outstanding volunteer groups.) Joyce Losure's background in farming, homemaking and raising three sons to adulthood equips her well for being president of PURE. With her gift of down-to-earth speaking, dry wit and keen common sense, she projects the image of this organization. Losure takes pride in the status PURE is gaining:

> We're learning lots of things about the political world and the educational world. We need to know what's going on educationally because our purpose is to promote and improve quality when and where we can. We don't want to keep our schools open just to have open buildings—that's not our purpose. We want our children to be prepared for life. We just feel they can be better prepared where they are individuals, where they have opportunities to be in sports, be in music, be in drama, and not just be the body in the back of the room.

LOHRVILLE: SAVE THE TOWN!

Another person grateful for PURE is Dr. Robert Baskerville, Superintendent of the Lohrville Community School District which sits about 120 miles southwest of CAL on 93.6 square miles of rich farmland. Baskerville notes:

> [The DPI] looks at hard, tight fact, and their fact is always based upon economics and endless statistical report following endless statistical report. That's one of the good things about PURE. Before, we used to argue from emotion, and they used to laugh at our emotion because they would say, 'Well, but the statistics show. . .' Then along came people like Jonathan Sher, who ran longitudinal studies on education, and for the first time we had tables. We had charts. We had DATA! My God, it was beautiful!

The Lohrville School is a brick building in Lohrville itself, a town about the size of Alexander and Coulter combined. There are 23 full-time and three-and-a-half part-time teachers. In a district with a population of 1400, the school had 254 students during 1977-1978.

Lohrville's economy is agricultural and subject to the fluctuations that bedevil farmers. The average educational level for people in the district: a high school diploma plus one year at an institution of higher learning. Forty-three percent of Lohrville's 573 townspeople are over 62 and live on a fixed income; they like living in Lohrville because it has the lowest taxes of any town in the county. Average income for the town is between $10,000 and $15,000.

Dr. Baskerville came to the district as superintendent in 1976. In contrast to his predecessor, he was dedicated to keeping the school open and alive. The school's population had fallen from 346 in 1971-1972 to 254 in 1978, mainly because, as in the CAL district, small farms were swallowed up by larger ones. Baskerville lost only one teacher, and that was through retirement. (By rearranging the junior high, he made do without adding a new teacher.) Baskerville started new programs in learning disabilities and industrial arts, and stretched resources by using teachers in related disciplines. Baskerville himself serves as elementary principal and teaches career education. His secondary principal also teaches drafting and cabinetmaking.

Baskerville is a big, eloquent man with a dramatic flair. One minute he throws out one-liners that would be the envy of any stand-up comedian. The next, he breathes fire at the DPI for its insensitivity to his district's needs. He believes superintendents should be leaders, innovators and creators; he sees himself as a superintendent with a calling:

> I really want to be the savior of Lohrville. The conditions are here. I can see that potential—it exists. With just a few breaks, we could put this place on the map. So far—no breaks.

Baskerville and others believe that rural living offers an attractive alternative to city life. Adults so inclined spend their evenings at the local tavern. Teenagers cruise the streets. Girls walk home in safety from their night softball games. Alan Berger, a recent high school graduate who lives in Lohrville and works in a family business, notes:

> People are coming back mainly because of the rat race in the larger cities. They love the country life. I lived in Fort Dodge [a city of 31,263 to the northeast] and I wouldn't go back for anything. A lot of the kids that are in a bigger town don't move back because there isn't anything here for them.

Baskerville believes the challenge is to create a future for young people in Lohrville. During his two years there, he has marshalled a small and determined force to reverse the community's population decline. Baskerville sees the town and school as interdependent—they hold the key to each other's survival. The Community Development Commission (CDC), a group appointed by the mayor to promote housing and business, reflects this thinking. Its members speak to the 21 clubs and organizations around town. (Baskerville himself believes in joining as many of these groups as he can.) Mayor Larry Headley states:

> If we talk about the school, we talk about the town because they go hand in hand. Now this is about the first thing the mayor, the town and the churches have gotten together on, and we feel it's just a necessity to grow and get things going.

Baskerville alternates between thinking the community's foot-dragging and what he saw as its uncanny ability change. In June 1978, he was bemoaning the community's foot-dragging and what he saw as its uncanny ability to head him off at the pass. (He and others had been working steadily to get a new business in town only to find that, as soon as people knew what they wanted land for, it was either unavailable or available at exorbitant prices.) Conservative forces in the town seemed to be lining up against the progressives. Many of the elderly living on fixed incomes feared taxes would soar if more business and industry located in town. Many liked their quiet life and did not want it changed. The progressives countered that the town had either to expand or die, that it had been dying because there was nothing to hold their children. As young people left, the town had grown older and smaller.

By September 1978, however, Baskerville's impatience with the community had turned to praise for its willingness to grow. The reason: a five percent increase in enrollment in the last year, the first increase since 1968. Baskerville gives all the credit to community residents on the Community Development Commission or others who have been reached by its message. For several months—without letting him know—people had been quietly talking relatives into moving back into the district. Older farm couples retiring into town are now being replaced on the farm by their children who had married and had children of their own. Farmers looking for hired hands now look first for people with children to expand the school district's enrollment. Consequently, fifty percent of the enrollment increase comes from people *returning* to the district. The number of births has also increased by one third.

If Baskerville and the Community Development Commission can recruit 25 more students evenly spread from K-12 over the next two years, he will not have to worry about enrollment. It will be stabilized. This reversal is especially sweet to Baskerville because the current increase springs chiefly from the efforts of people he spurred into action. (Baskerville himself has also been enticing people with large families into the district and expects his efforts to blossom in 1979.)

Career Education as the Key

Baskerville's efforts to enlarge and stabilize his community have covered many fronts. In 1978, he realized another success: his bid for an HEW grant to develop a $21,000 pilot project in career education was granted. Although the school board had previously voted to discontinue it, Baskerville resurrected and revamped the career education program shortly after arriving in Lohrville because he thought this program contained the seeds for saving the community.

During his graduate work, Baskerville had developed a career education program he thought applicable to Lohrville's situation because it was tailored to rural areas and designed to retain graduates. This program required that the community become involved in its own and its school's growth. Baskerville's model provided a theoretical framework for community involvement in the school and expanded the concept of career education to exploring local career opportunities. Baskerville first gained the school board's and teachers' support for his model; then others in the community picked up on the model's proposal for community involvement in planning for growth through a Community Development Commission (CDC).

The career education program aims at retaining high school graduates in Lohrville. Now in an experimental stage, the program will provide students with guidance and information about choosing careers, expose them to what Lohrville and the surrounding area have to offer, give them a chance to try a variety of work experiences and encourage them to reflect on the advantages of rural living. Baskerville wants to help students find their roots:

> Through career education, in addition to becoming more aware of oneself—likes, dislikes, who I am, why I'm here, where I'm going—there is also an understanding of where I've been. Kids don't realize that, in 1981, we in this town will be celebrating our centennial. They don't know about how booming Lohrville once was and how it was the only town in northwest Iowa with three *different* railroad companies converging in it.
>
> Very few of the kids probably realize that rural is good. I want this career education program to teach these kids there's no shame in being rural. We've got cultures and customs. We've got heritage, lineage—just as many things to be proud of as people in the cities, if not more because we are at least rooted. And that means something!

In their junior year, students will take vocational aptitude tests; during their senior year, they will spend six weeks each semester in career education activities.

Seniors follow the same pattern both semesters: two weeks of career education in the classroom; one forty-hour week shadowing, or working with, a business person in the area; a second week shadowing a different business person; and, a two-week debriefing in class analyzing their work experiences.

Baskerville has already found about forty business people in the area who have agreed to work with students in the shadowing part of the program. For him, shadowing has emerged as the major way to involve the community in the school.

Even prior to the career education program, community people had been willing to share their work with students. Molly Clark, who teaches junior and senior speech, English and German, reports that no business or professional people or industries have turned her down when she has asked to visit them.

Marilyn Collis, business teacher, agrees that the career education program has the potential to change students' attitudes about their home area. Her husband, Clark, adds that they may learn "some respect for what people in Lohrville are doing—that, yes, it is a small town, but yes, you can do something worthwhile."

Baskerville hopes the program will help students see the interrelationships between the community and its economic base: when farmers have a bad year, the businesses in the community suffer; when they have a good year, everyone prospers.

"I hope to give these kids an occupational happening—where they will see the connection, where they will see there is a possibility to make a living in Lohrville, Iowa—rural America—and that they can be happy here," says Baskerville. Keeping graduates in the community ultimately means survival—more young families, more children and higher enrollment.

Baskerville has gotten the community's support. He feels that he also gets good support from the Area Education Agency—the kind of support he does not receive but would like from the state Department of Public Instruction. People in Lohrville's district—like the people at CAL—think that the DPI is insensitive to their wants and needs. Baskerville claims:

> The DPI is removed from the stiuation. It has no idea of the hopes, fears, dreams and aspirations of each local district. Districts have personalities, like people. They think it's easy for people to give up their sense of identity and become part of something else. But that's not easy—it goes all the way back to man's tribal instincts.

TWO RURAL IOWA COMMUNITIES: SIMILAR BUT DIFFERENT

The Lohrville and CAL Community School Districts are alike in that they are both rural districts struggling with declining enrollment while resisting consolidation. Both are headed by intelligent, assertive superintendents. They are unlike in many other ways, however. The emphasis at CAL is on maintaining and expanding good educational programs, with little effort at building enrollment. The emphasis at Lohrville is on revitalizing the community to rebuild enrollment and on retaining graduates. Both efforts should increase enrollment.

The financial problems are similar in some respects and different in others. Both communities are resisting the state's efforts to consolidate districts with student populations of less than 1000; they resist individually and also collectively, through PURE. Each suffers under the restrictions of the Iowa Foundation Plan's formula and the continued need to appeal to the School Budget Review Committee. Thus far, people in CAL have been ready and willing to spend whatever they need to make their school the way they want it. They were already spending at a high level in 1971 when the state legislature froze the amount local districts could spend on their schools. Lohrville, with lower taxes, was spending at a much more conservative level. They get even less money than CAL from the state because their enrollment has dropped and they have about 100 fewer students than CAL; therefore, the superintendent and CDC have focused on increasing enrollment by involving the community to change population trends. Jess views the DPI and the legislature as the source of his fiscal problems, so his strategy has been to take political action to lift restrictions from his district, a battle which CAL continues to wage.

Baskerville and Jess also have very different leadership styles. Baskerville has not consulted the people of his district through such tools as community surveys. Instead, he has come in with an idea and persuaded people to accept it. He has flair, and his ideas seem well suited to the community's needs. His stance is aggressive and he does not always have his community's full support. He has convinced more progressively-minded people in the community to try it his way and has formed a political coalition that may pave the way for future ambitions—if he can turn the community around and his career education pilot program develops as he hopes. Baskerville is creative, and wants his dreams to be realized because he grew up on an Iowa farm and feels that if he can make good, so can other rural kids.

Jess also grew up in rural Iowa and takes pride in his heritage, in the lessons he learned at rural schools, lessons like how to budget his time, how to do a lot of things well and how to be a leader. Jess practices his belief that superintendents should listen to the people in their districts, find out what they want from their schools and help them design schools which do that. He informs people about what is going on at school through distributing the CAL-O-GRAM, encourages parent participation on committees and boards, and builds mutual understanding and good will through the parent volunteer program, the informal exchanges that occur in small towns and community surveys. Jess responds to what he learns about people's desires and hopes for their children's education; their concerns influence his decisions to continue or change school programs.

This contrast does not imply, however, that the people of CAL support their school more than the people of Lohrville. "I do feel that people are public-spirited in Lohrville," says Harvey Applegate, president of the Commercial Club and one of those committed to the Community Development Commission's goals.

Both superintendents share similar attitudes about other things that can be done in the pinch created by declining enrollment. Baskerville lists shared transportation, shared facilities and shared staffing as some of them. Like Jess, he makes good use of his Area Educational Agency for services: speech clinicians, psychologists, learning disabilities specialists, social workers, elementary curriculum consultants, Title 1 consultants and media service people.

In Lohrville and CAL, teachers and administrators live in the same community as their students; they all know each other. In a smaller school where everybody cares about one another, Baskerville notes:

> The process is improved. It becomes more humanizing and not so much a mechanistic thing. I'm talking about the development of self-confidence. Economic efficiency is not education, and I do not believe equal money means equal education. There are so many intrinsic intangibles that you can't lay your fingers on.[4]

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People like Baskerville, Jess and others believe not only that reorganization of small school districts into larger ones will *not* solve the problems of declining enrollment, but also that it will destroy the sense of community and participation in their children's education which they cherish.

To people in small districts who wish to keep their schools, consolidation seems short-sighted and unrealistic because it does not take into account community desires and needs, local district rights to self-determination, and the good educational programs already provided in some small schools. Nor do calls for consolidation take into account the sense of powerlessness, loneliness and rootlessness which people often experience when thrown into larger social systems over which they feel they have no control.[7]

The CAL and Lohrville advocates of smaller schools believe they have a good case based on sound educational programs, hard research data[8] and strong community support. Now they want a hearing for their case for less restrictive state mandates and more local control.

The successes in these two rural Iowa districts have emerged from five distinct and fertile fields of actions:

- Involving parents.
- Individualizing programs for students.
- Decentralizing organizational and administrative functions.
- Involving local places of employment in the life of the local school and in keeping graduates in the community.
- Organizing on a statewide basis for political action.

These are fields which both rural and urban people who are up against the wall of declining enrollment can explore. Effective cultivation of these fields has led Jess to feel that:

> Declining enrollment is a beautiful period in time because we don't have to worry about accommodating *increasing* population. We can now take the time to develop quality programs by using our facilities to better advantage—offering more programs and having fewer pupils per teacher in our classes.

The CAL and Lohrville stories demonstrate that a strong political and educational alliance between citizens and educators can turn adversity into more imaginative and valuable programs for young people.

FOOTNOTES

Self Determination for Rural Schools

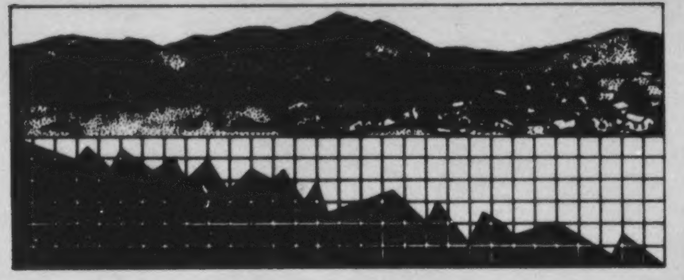
1. James Jess, "The Problem of Providing for Meaningful Evaluation," *People United for Rural Education Newsletter* (December 1977), p. 16.
2. For more on this approach to learning and on how decentralization can foster individual growth, see Robert E. Skenes, *Free Forming: Greater Personal Fulfillment Through Living Democracy*, in press.
3. Jonathan Sher and Rachel Tompkins, *Economy, Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of Rural School District Consolidation* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, July 1976), pp. 4-5. Sher and Tompkins state that ". . .in most rural areas there are virtually no inherent differences in the operational costs of districts anywhere within the range of 400 to 2,100 students . . .Thus, while consolidation has become the conventional wisdom in rural education, careful scrutiny of the available evidence makes the adoption of this particular policy appear to be considerably more conventional than wise." See also, Jonathan P. Sher, ed., *Education in Rural American: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977).
4. James Jess, "Rethinking Iowa's State School Finance Plan," *People United for Rural Education Newsletter* (February 1978), pp. 4-5.

5. See also Jess's dissertation, "Quality, Equity, Efficiency, Evaluation and Local Flexibility: The Political and Educational Dilemmas of Iowa's Foundation Plan," Ph.D. Dissertation, Drake University, 1977.

6. In their exhaustive research in *Big School, Small School* (Palo Alto, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1974), Roger Barker and Paul Gump found many advantages to the learnings from small schools. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall summarizes Barker's findings, ". . .in small schools, students participated more, it meant more to them, they were more tolerant of others, they formed closer, more lasting relationships, were more effective in group processes, could communicate better, performed six times more in responsible positions . . .they were absent less often, were more productive, were more articulate, and found their work more meaningful. In other words, the small schools produced better citizens, who tended to be more satisfied with their lives and were more competent in every way." See Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1976), p. 182.

7. What the people of CAL and Lohrville are arguing is that their students would find life less viable in larger schools and that school reorganization is a threat to their society, to their rural values and ways of life. See Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 70.

8. See for example, James Jess, ed., "Rural Education: Yesterday, Today and Tommorrow," Report of the First Annual State Convention of People United for Rural Education, Des Moines, Iowa, 2-3 February 1978.



TWENTY YEARS OF CRISIS: SHRINKING ENROLLMENT IN THE SALT LAKE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Twila Van Leer and Ray Boren

Ray Boren is a Salt Lake City native who graduated from the University of Utah. For the past five years he has been a member of the staff of the Deseret News. *Twila Van Leer is a resident of Salt Lake and writer for the* Deseret News. *She received the Mark E. Peterson Excellence in Writing Award in 1977. She and her husband, Dirk, have ten children. She has also written for the* Great Falls Tribune *in Montana.*

"I used to say you shouldn't talk to people about politics and religion. Now I believe you shouldn't talk with them about children and schools," comments school board member Dan Bushnell, only half-jokingly. He and others are still smarting from the problems caused by declining enrollment and school closings in Salt Lake City.

From 1958 to 1978, the Salt Lake City School District closed 26 schools—mostly in the center of town—as enrollment fell from 41,939 to 24,783. Closing a school could be easy. Simply locking the door and posting an announcement might do the trick—but it doesn't. People and personalities, needs and hopes become involved.

"Salt Lake City has always had a custom of neighborhood schools," says Dr. M. Lynn Bennion, former superintendent of schools. "Parents will accept busing only on a temporary basis. Each school has a longstanding tradition in its own neighborhood, and parents want their children close to home."

In general, Utahns are family-oriented. Salt Lake City, which has burst the confines of its beautiful valley and started to climb the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains, is a city proud of its neighborhoods. It is well-known for its wide streets, for its proximity to towering mountains and famous ski resorts, and for historic Temple Square, headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Salt Lake's citizens have often been willing to become involved in civic problems and projects. They generally support the PTA and other traditional parent-school programs; they fiercely defend local control of schools. Part of their possessiveness may derive from the fact that more of their tax dollars—51 percent of all state and local government revenues—go to public and higher education than to any other government service, including police and fire protection.

Utah is first in the union in spending for public and higher education as a percentage of personal income. The city's three biggest taxpayers are Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph, Utah Power and Light, and the corporate entities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Other major taxpayers include oil companies, other utilities, banks and a railroad. The city has a thriving downtown business area and office complexes in many locations; it is the commercial center for a multi-state area.

During the fifties, metropolitan Salt Lake spread rapidly beyond the boundaries of the original city. The move to the suburbs in the Salt Lake Valley was on, while in the central city, industry replaced homes in some neighborhoods and the interstate highway system cut a wide swath through the city's west side. Declining enrollment was hardly a problem at that time. The school district was concerned with housing and instruction for the peak load of young people created by the post-World War II baby boom. Schools, particularly those on the city's periphery, were overloaded.

The district's administrators, led by veteran Superintendent Bennion, tried to convince parents that double sessions and busing were preferable to an overambitious building program which would prove superfluous when the baby boom leveled out. There were solid indications then of the ensuing exodus from the city which ultimately decimated the district's student population. In the early sixties, enrollment in the city began to drop and it became apparent that the district would have to close schools to maintain a healthy economic position.

Dr. Bennion had operated a people-oriented administration in the past and he found his experience promoting dialogue valuable when approaching neighborhoods about school closings. During his tenure, six schools were closed, one or two at a time. Parents helped make the decisions, primarily through committees appointed to study proposals, alternatives and procedures for closing in each school area. Bennion remarks:

> I found it unproductive to hold mass meetings. People would usually be in an agitated mood. I asked those most concerned to appoint a committee, and usually they appointed able, thoughtful, intelligent representatives. I became a mediator. If we could convince them

> that what we were doing was necessary they were helpful in convincing others in the school area.

The early period of enrollment decline offered opportunities for program improvement. Diminishing class size opened space; classrooms were remodeled for special education programs and cafeterias. Decline also prompted a change of heart among members of the school board. The district had long taken a philosophical position against seeking extra government grants; according to Bennion, it eventually found itself the only holdout district in the state. Now, however, Salt Lake has become the state's most aggressive district in terms of seeking federal dollars to enhance programs and facilities. Federal money for specialized programs brings in more staff and requires space—of which the district has plenty.

After a 24-year superintendency, Dr. Bennion retired in 1969 and was succeeded by Dr. Arthur B. Wiscombe. By then, the student population in the district was in a full-scale slide. Dr. Wiscombe and the board closed 14 schools between 1969 and 1973. They sought only limited parent contribution to the process and were confronted by bitter citizen outcry.

Parents who had been actively involved in school affairs during Bennion's tenure found it difficult even to meet with Dr. Wiscombe. Mrs. Ione Davis, a veteran activist, even found Wiscombe unresponsive to her attempts to arrange an interview to discuss a reading study, not school closings.

"I was first told Dr. Wiscombe would see me in about six weeks, but the day before my appointment, his secretary called me and said he was too busy," Davis explains. Eventually, she bypassed Dr. Wiscombe and voiced her concern directly to the school board.

While the board was coping with fast-dropping rolls, school closings, and angry parents in the early 1970's, its members were also divided over Wiscombe's controversial administration. The multitude of pressures was hard on the board members.

"I am a bruised, battered and confused politician," member Ada Burt said in 1972. Shortly thereafter, she decided not to seek reelection. One reason she chose not to run again was that the board's membership had been reduced by the state legislature from twelve to seven, still two larger than any other Utah school board.

The reduction in number meant all board members were up for reelection in the fall of 1972. This board had been threatened repeatedly by angry parents, many of whom vowed to vote against incumbents in retaliation for school closings. Several city residents decided to run for the board themselves—47 people filed for the 14 places on the general election ballot. Only four of the twelve board members decided to seek reelection, and three retained their seats. One of the holdovers was current board president, Dan Bushnell, who had pushed for the reduction.

Bushnell, a Salt Lake attorney, had been a board member for ten years and is the only veteran of the "bad years." He found that people did not mind school closings as long as the closings, consolidations or boundary realignments did not affect them. But, he continues:

> We've had to take a lot of brick-bats every time we've done it. Parents just can't understand it emotionally. Closure was absolute fiscal necessity, though. If we had not done it, we would now be bankrupt.

Bushnell points to examples of other districts that have delayed school closings only to close a dozen schools at a time, angering thousands of citizens, throwing hundreds of teachers out of work, and sometimes even endangering the district's economy to the point of disaster.

A People-Oriented Approach

Dr. Wiscombe left the district and was succeeded by Dr. M. Donald Thomas in mid-1973. The shift from confrontation to cooperation seemed immediate as Dr. Thomas restructured the administration and vowed an open door policy.

Thomas came to the district with some experience in closing schools to conform with declining population numbers. In Amsterdam, New York, he had had to close two schools when the area's textile and carpet industries foundered and people moved out. Thomas notes:

> I was prepared for Salt Lake City. I had read what I could about the history of the school district and knew that it was at that moment a high conflict area. I asked the board at the outset what they wanted and where I should concentrate my skills and efforts.

Resolving public conflict was at the top of the board's list. Closely following were upgrading student accomplishment to meet national standards and balancing the district's budget. Thomas realized closing schools was not an easy task, but neither did he find it a frightening one. He approached his number one assignment with two premises in mind:

- Closing schools is essential when student numbers decline.
- The problems associated with closure are not educational, but human. Teachers fear closure because it threatens their job security; parents, because they fear that the quality of education will be jeopardized.

Lorna Matheson, an active parent who serves on her School Community Council, says:

> There was a complete turnabout to welcoming parent input in an informal atmosphere. Dr. Thomas recognized the crucial nature of the neighborhood philosophy—the difficulty of adjusting to school closure and fear of change in a very family- and church-oriented city. Once the neighborhoods realized the necessity of closing schools, after a two year educational process with seven public hearings, they accepted it.

As soon as he became superintendent, Dr. Thomas initiated a people-oriented program. He established a citizens' advisory committee on school building needs, headed by retired banker Ames K. Bagley. The committee was to recommend responses to declining enrollment; its work was divided between two groups, one for elementary and the other for secondary schools. Its membership represented a cross-section of the community, balanced as to geography and background. Professional leaders, businessmen, civic-minded people, housewives and others contributed to its recommendations. Chairman Bagley notes:

> We'd already had one superintendent who had told the board what was going to happen, instead of the other way around. Dr. Thomas took the approach that changes in the district had to be made with community support.

The two committees combined their recommendations and presented them to the school board. Bagley notes that the committee's suggestions grew out of careful consideration of many factors; none were made until each of the affected schools had been visited and many meetings held. The committee worked from administration suggestions with research and clerical help from district staff.

After their initial study, the committee's proposals were not forgotten as the prospect of more clos-

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ings neared. The district set up building councils to study remodeling and renovation needs. In instances where closings are under way, these councils consider suggestions from area residents each step of the way. District files overflow with paper and studies prepared by ad hoc citizen groups, detailing their concerns with closings and almost always listing reasons why a school should remain open.

When he took over the superintendency, Dr. Thomas initiated a plan for shared school governance which serves as a national model for public participation in the affairs of schools.[1] This model involves the interaction of two councils at each local school. A School Community Council composed of eight parents and eight school staff members addresses school goals and outcomes ranging from discipline to program and scheduling. The council is not advisory and no votes are taken. Instead, the group must negotiate to reach consensus. When they do so, their decisions are implemented by a second council. This second group is an internal partnership, equally balanced between teacher and administrator membership. Called the School Improvement Council, it manages the school site, making decisions about such things as master schedules and school budgetary limitations; this group also operates on the consensus model. Both councils function within Board of Education policy limitations, but have much latitude. In practice, some councils serve minimally while others have made significant contributions to their schools. Thomas explains that this council structure "establishes a procedure for dealing with differences in an orderly way which keeps a low conflict climate."

When new buildings are planned in the growing suburbs or when old schools have to be replaced, the local community council assists in choice of site and design. At one school, parents also asked to participate in se-

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lecting curricula. They were allowed to do so, within the district's policy guidelines. At another school, parents asked for and received permission to try an open classroom for a year; they then contributed time on a volunteer basis to help make the experiment work.

Dr. Thomas finds the development of certain membership qualities essential to effective councils. These include the abilities to listen, synthesize, tolerate ambiguity, be decisive when faced with difficult decisions, remain positive despite conflict and confrontation, and be open, trusting and accepting of opponents.

Support for the Present Administration

Ione Davis, for one, has found the Thomas administration's open door policy refreshing. Reflecting on her failure to establish rapport with the previous administration, she says, "I think the communication between the school board, teachers, administrators and citizens is 100 percent improved." Mrs. Davis has been able to make her voice heard as a member of both a School Community Council and a special study committee. A civic activist who regularly attends school board meetings—"I tend to be very vocal," Mrs. Davis says—she was appointed to the districtwide citizens' advisory committee on school building needs. That committee, headed by Ames Bagley, recommended transfer of the ninth grades to the high schools, a move which the board approved and which kept the city's four prized high schools alive.

Mrs. Davis lives on Salt Lake City's east side in a neighborhood of large, individualistic homes snuggling up to the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains. She has served as a PTA president and is now involved with the community council for Hillside Junior High School. Mrs. Davis first became involved with the district when she and three other parents raised questions about a districtwide reading program. She subsequently tried to get an open area by a school turned into a neighborhood park, but failed because families who lived by the field opposed it.

Then, in 1973, Davis and several other community leaders, joined the school building needs council. Its twelve members met regularly for three months, discussing the problems and consequences of declining enrollment with parents, teachers and principals in each of the district's junior high schools. Their recommendations: close several junior high schools; keep the seventh and eighth grades as classes in intermediate schools; and, transfer all ninth grades to the high schools. All of their recommendations were implemented.

More recently, as a member of the Hillside Community Council, Mrs. Davis has been involved with selecting teachers, assisting teachers and the principal on projects and helping run the school. "Under the old regime, that had never been heard of," she notes.

Bethany Lemperle, president of the Jordan Junior High PTA was one of those who thought you "couldn't fight city hall"—or a school board—and win. But, when the dust had cleared after hearings about the proposed closing of Jordan Junior High, the school was still open. Another school where parents were apparently less concerned, where they did not dig in their heels and resist, had been closed instead. "By George, we did it," Mrs. Lemperle says, recalling an evening when she stood before school members and read scores of messages petitioning to keep Jordan open.

Mrs. Lemperle, a former teacher, lives on the city's west side in an area of small frame homes with people of mixed incomes and ages. Shortly after her election as PTA president, the Board of Education announced plans to close the school. She notes:

> The school had been remodeled and it wasn't in bad condition. It was an old school, but a lot of tradition was involved there. They had already torn down two old elementary schools.

(Closing the school would not have had a personal impact on Mrs. Lemperle because her youngest child was in the school's ninth grade; still, she was concerned.)

One man in the neighborhood called a citizens' meeting so people could discuss the district's plans and the possibility of taking action. The parents decided to conduct a door-to-door survey to gather statistics and comments. It was this information which Mrs. Lemperle presented at the public hearing in January 1975. "When I got through, there was a remarkable pause," she says. "They didn't think anyone would stand up and read all those responses."

A few weeks later, a district administrator notified her, before releasing the information to the press, that Jordan Junior High would be kept open. Says Lemperle:

> I've been impressed by that—because they took our effort seriously, because they do listen to you. I had no idea you could fight city hall. After all, they had all those statistics and information.

Since then, she has been involved with the Westside Community Council, a citizens' group not tied to the schools. The council now meets regularly with a school board member—a rare occurrence only a few years ago. Mrs. Lemperle has also found the Mormon church's involvement in the area useful, "It has really helped revitalize the neighborhood." (The church purchased two abandoned elementary school sites and financed construction of several homes.)

Dissatisfaction with the School Closing Process

Not all citizen groups have been as successful as Mrs. Lemperle's and Mrs. Davis's. Mrs. Richard Keene, for example, has come away from the school closing battle convinced that the district operates from preconceived plans; she feels that citizen participation is a sham which mollifies parents and glosses over administrators' tendencies to only half listen. In the fall of 1978, despite impressive citizen group efforts to prove district forecasts and studies invalid, Douglas Elementary School, where the Keene children attended classes, closed. Its student body merged with that of Webster Elementary School to close enrollment gaps in both schools. Mrs. Keene believes the parents did indeed show the district planners to be wrong, but she says:

> They wouldn't admit it when we proved their own research was shoddy. They attempted to build an image of shared governance but administrative staff cooperation was only surface.

Douglas School had been spared twice from the list of schools to be trimmed from the district's roster. When threatened again in 1978, Douglas parents did more than embark on the usual door-to-door campaign. They studied census data, enrollment figures for each district elementary school since 1955, and the literature on declining enrollment; they also compared each elementary school's state ratings on life safety, structural soundness, educational adequacy, and the feasibility of remodeling or replacing its facilities. Next, they put together a 50-page report and a presentation with more than 60 displays to support their views. Finally, they invited citizens, state government representatives, Mayor Ted L. Wilson and other city officials, businessmen, church leaders, the media and other interested individuals to a public meeting on the possible closing.

The school district had promised to discuss four alternatives for Douglas and Webster, Mrs. Keene says. Instead, she notes, "they exploded a bombshell on us," announcing the plan to combine Webster and Douglas in a junior high school building. Mrs. Keene disagreed with this step because "the high SES* parents would flee and the others would have to send their children a much greater distance across heavy traffic." She has continued her involvement in the schools and was elected to the school board. She will continue to work with her local building council in planning the building of a new school.

Mrs. Ruth Ross shares Mrs. Keene's feeling that administrative efforts to involve citizens are token. Moreover, she believes there were racial overtones in the decision to close the Sumner elementary school, located in the rapidly declining central city. (Sumner's racial mixture was unlike that of the district as a whole because the district's twelve percent minority population in 1970 was concentrated primarily in the central city.)

Mrs. Ross believes that closing the central city schools has contributed to the problem which precipitated closings in the first place: young people who might have stayed in the central city have moved away because of the lack of neighborhood schools so the area continues to decline. Mrs. Ross notes that area residents had wanted to retain the school, even though enrollment was going down steadily.

> There was a lot of resistance to closing the school. The space could have been utilized for other community purposes. I was not convinced that they finally took the right step. Information meetings were more for dispensing district propaganda than for gathering information.

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*Socioeconomic status

> I think the decision was made to close the school long before citizen participation was sought.

The school closing did have one positive byproduct, according to Mrs. Ross. Citizens who might otherwise never have become involved in a public issue participated on community councils. Mrs. Ross, for one, ran for the school board, though unsuccessfully, to further her philosophies about neighborhood schools.

Effects of Decline

1. Financial Impact

W. Gary Harmer, who became the district's money manager in early 1973, believes the district has taken advantage of its enrollment decline. When Harmer assumed the district's clerk-treasurer post, Salt Lake's school board was in a financial bind. "The district was $1.2 million in the red," he says. "We had to make adjustments." Enrollment had been decreasing and the budget growing while the state's share of education costs had not increased to close the gap. State payments to local districts were then based on average daily attendance and had not yet been adjusted to compensate for enrollment decline and budget increases.

The current financial formula has emerged over the past several decades. It includes a state-district partnership to fund a minimum basic program[2]; a voted leeway for curriculum enrichment[3]; capital financing for building[4]; and, special taxes and categorical money for specific programs[5]. In addition, the district can seek special bonding, as it did a few years ago when it initiated a campaign to build new schools to replace unsafe, multistoried, turn-of-the-century structures. The state has empowered school boards to handle the basic capital funding leeway, and legislators have not sought to change that situation. "It has been that way as far back as I can remember," says Harmer.

Careful money management has put the district in good financial shape, according to Harmer, who says:

> We have a low levy, but get a good amount of money—we have lots of assessed valuation for the number of children we have.

From 1960 to 1978, spending per child in the district zoomed up 457 percent—from $309.74 to $1,425.08, including federal monies. (Salt Lake's aggressive search for federal money for specialized programs has brought in more staff and contributed to the cost per student.) Even considering inflation, this increase, due in part to the district's emphasis on reducing class size, was spectacular.

2. Class Size and Grouping

The Salt Lake City district has emphasized class size reduction, a tremendously expensive program costing more than a million dollars a year, in the belief that it increases the quality of education. Current pupil-teacher ratios (including resource teachers and aides) average 16.65 students for grades kindergarten through six, and 21.52 for grades seven to twelve. The overall per pupil-teacher ratio, including all special programs, is 18.52.

In comparison, Utah's Granite and Jordan School Districts—both sites of suburban growth—have average ratios of 22.41 and 23.12 respectively. These differences in per pupil-teacher ratios reflect population shifts. While Salt Lake's student population has plummeted by about 15,500 since 1960, Granite's and Jordan's have increased by more than 20,000 each.

URBAN-SUBURBAN POPULATION SHIFTS

	1960	1977	Change
Salt Lake City	40,545	24,999	– 15,546
Granite	38,142	60,356	+ 22,214
Jordan	11,692	39,615	+ 27,923

In 1975, the school board, following the recommendation of the committee on school building needs, voted to transfer all ninth grades to the high schools, a move which saved the four high schools and added approximately 500 pupils to a population of about 1500 at each school. This decision was made after extensive study of common school grouping practices, their apparent advantages and disadvantages.

At the time, many people were concerned that ninth graders were not mature enough for high school and that their transfer to the high schools would leave leadership gaps in the junior high. Dr. A. LeGrand Parsons, principal of Northwest Intermediate School, remarks:

> There is a significant difference in student maturity level between the eighth and ninth grades. The oldest group in the junior high school is traditionally looked to for leadership. However, it appears that the ninth graders have been assimilated into the high schools without too much difficulty. Their going has provided more opportunity for those in the intermediate school classes.

Procedures have changed somewhat in the past three years to accomodate the change in the high schools' student bodies. At first, many school staff members and parents thought that ninth graders did not receive sufficient orientation. They were registered last, even though they were unfamiliar with the process of selecting their own teachers and courses. "Now they've changed that," Mrs. Davis of the Hillside Community Council says. "They have an orientation period and register the ninth graders first."

Brian Lloyd, senior at West High School in 1978-1979 and member of the first class to make the switch, does not view earlier entry into high school as a problem. He observes:

> Those who would have had a hard time making the change in tenth grade probably had a hard time in the ninth. The school held orientation in the spring before school was out and again in the fall. High school wasn't as much different as I expected. This way, the eighth graders get a crack at being the 'wheels' a year earlier.

An evaluation of the ninth grade experience, including interviews with parents, students and teachers, has recently been completed. This study shows positive effects from the new grouping: the ninth grade dropout rate is significantly lower, adjustment problems have been minimal, and course alternatives and subsidiary services have increased. Parent participation on high school shared governance councils has also increased. Intermediate school students (seventh and eighth graders) have expressed more satisfaction with the opportunities available to them in a smaller school. The committee and Thomas have concluded that this new grouping arrangement is more appropriate.

3. Program and Teachers

The changing face of the city and a diminished school population have led to several changes in curriculum and teaching. The transfer of the ninth grades to the high schools has had a very specific impact, as Dr. Darlene Ball, the district's administrator for educational accountability notes. Ninth graders now have a wider choice of courses than when their classes were located in the junior high schools.

Dr. LaVar L. Sorensen, a former central office administrator who moved into the principalship of South High School along with the first class of ninth graders, has found the switch from junior high to intermediate schools beneficial, particularly for students talented in the arts, vocations and athletics. In high school, they have the opportunity to hone their skills to a greater degree than in junior high. Sorensen adds that changes in the city and its population have led to other changes related to the reduction in class size: financing of special programs has become more difficult and quality of enrichment programs has tended to drop as the school's focus has narrowed to the required curriculum. At the same time, consolidation has allowed pooling of discretionary funds to develop compensatory programs such as a program for the gifted and talented, hiring of full-time librarians at every school, and increasing subsidiary services and in-service training for teachers and administrators. Many of these changes reflect a change in district priorities.

The specter of reduced facilities had raised teachers' fears but an intensive district program to avoid layoffs has allayed them, according to Dr. Thomas. The district has encouraged early retirement and set up a program to place teachers in nearby districts when reductions in staff are necessary. It has also sponsored some retraining for other areas of school employment and job sharing for teachers who prefer part-time work in the classroom. The district's program has kept the present total of 1,023 teachers from falling even farther below the 1958 total of 1,360. Thomas also cited two other policies which have minimized staff reductions and benefited the district: reduction in classroom loads, and addition of special education and federal government programs.

In spite of declining enrollment, Thomas's administration had vowed to improve the quality of education offered by the district's schools, and changes made in response to declining enrollment have apparently supported this goal. Judging from the evidence of test scores over a three-year period, his administration has made good on its promise. Test scores show district pupils making marked improvement when compared with the national norms for reading and mathematics. For example, scores posted in May 1977 showed district fourth and sixth graders below the national norm in reading while six graders were below norm and fourth graders just at the national norm in mathematics. In May 1978, scores were above the national norm in every category except sixth grade reading which was just at the norm. Dr. Thomas hopes to see even more progress and school board president, Dan Bushnell, emphasizes the value of test score achievement:

> What is more important than the school buildings, money, locations and so on, [is that] we can demonstrate that our educational accomplishments with students are on the increase.

Bushnell also says that a summer program for students performing below grade level has begun, and that parents support this program. A fourth track English program has also been added in response to parent suggestions.

Pointing to long lists of programs added since the mid-sixties, Clerk-Treasurer Gary Harmer says:

> Citizens' ideas have been helpful and plentiful. Never a week goes by that people don't offer suggestions for special programs. Only recently, people have sought help for the mildly handicapped, tests to monitor basic

> skills, and money to improve English literature courses. We try to hear their appeals and then concentrate our money where the dollars can be most productively spent.

Actually, only about ten percent of the special project proposals come from parents; most come from staff members and teachers. The majority of proposals are not implemented.

"Unless a proposal is something that really addresses a vital need, it does not get a high priority," Harmer says. The proposals are collected over a period of several months, and priorities established when budgets are prepared. Continuing special projects generally get priority because, as Harmer commented, "There is so much pressure to keep doing what you're already doing."

4. Facility Use

Where the learn-and-play noises of children once permeated the air at the old Grant School, the sounds of automobiles pulling into and out of a motel are now heard; where students once puzzled over their books in the old Curtis school, adults are now trained by Mountain State Telephone Company; where pre-World War II youngsters once daydreamed and waited for recess at the Oquirrh School, secretaries now work in plush offices with a turn-of-the-century flair.

As four junior highs and 22 elementary schools have emptied, the buildings have been used for other school programs, sold for non-school uses, or retained for temporary housing of students while the district completes new buildings in its reconstruction project. Many of the old schools are gone, however. Office buildings, motels and parking lots stand in their places. Of those that remain, one has been transformed into a beautiful office building, another serves as district headquarters for

Headstart, and another has been turned into a center which teaches social and employment skills to the mentally handicapped of all ages.

One of the most beneficial uses of a once-empty building can be found in the former Horace Mann Junior High, located near West High School on the city's near-west side. When attrition claimed many of the junior highs, Horace Mann was among the doomed. But today the building is busy year-round and Edward O. Salisbury, director of the Community Education Services Program located there, feels Horace Mann has become a cosmopolitan place, a school where young and old people from many foreign nations come to learn.

Community Education Services began early in the century as a high school completion and adult education program; it is now an umbrella for many district programs. Horace Mann's day and evening classes include high school basics, vocational education and English as a second language. (The English classes teach 140 students from 27 countries including Mexico, Vietnam, Japan and Iran.)

Horace Mann also houses two other programs: a special intermediate school program and the headquarters of a districtwide community school. The intermediate school program serves about fifty troubled seventh and eighth graders. Caring teachers and social workers help them learn and develop better self-images so they can work successfully in school. The community school program, held during the evening at Horace Mann and twelve other schools, teaches crafts and basic scholastic skills to both children and parents.

The melding of different cultures and constituencies at Horace Mann characterizes the central city. Dr. Sorensen, principal of South High which also serves the central city, sees that melding as a plus. "One of the strengths of the school is our multicultural student body," he notes.

THE FUTURE

Decline has not come to a full stop; Salt Lake continues to change. What does the future hold for the district serving the city? Local officials are trying to preserve the central city and fend off encroaching decay by financing homeowner renovations and constructing pilot projects in downtown areas. Central city building is on the upswing, but much of it consists of multi-dwelling units to be occupied by young couples or retired persons with few children to swell the ranks of schoolgoers. Industrialization of the area is also likely to continue making inroads into former residential neighborhoods. Thus, while population in Salt Lake City will increase, according to Thayne Robson, director of the University of Utah's Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the increase will not necessarily feed a school building boom in the district.

Residential development is projected for the city's northwest boundaries, and Dr. Thomas indicates that the district must look there for any increase in student population. The city's possible annexation of part of the county could also add 40,000 people to the district. The county, however, opposes annexation of the proposed tracts because it would eat away at its tax base. Residential development and annexation are not immediate solutions to the district's population erosion; these issues will only be resolved in the future. A substantive change in the district's enrollment picture will require reversal of the trend revealed by census records: in 1960, the population of Salt Lake City was 189,454 while the metropolitan area had 447,795; by 1970, the city's population had dropped to 175,885 but the metropolitan population had jumped by more than 100,000 to 557,635.

Thomas predicts that the city's population will continue to decline and become older, needing fewer schools. He also anticipates a continued eight to ten percent expansion rate in the county as the young continue to settle there. Demographers expect these two trends to stabilize about 1984, resulting in a city population near 180,000. The plan is to continue consolidation, particularly at the high school level, because population per school is predicted to drop from the present 2000 to about 1400 per school. Now that the immediate problem has been met, however, the rate of consolidation will slow down and accompany the rate of decline.

Thomas has become a national spokesman on alternative approaches to declining enrollments and budgets. Many of his suggestions involve resource pooling and cooperative services. He also thinks schools must look to new markets servicing all age groups. During Thomas's six year tenure, the schools have initiated parenting classes which now serve about 1000 people yearly and a program in which several thousand senior citizens volunteer in the schools.

Thomas believes that success in meeting the problem of decline requires the support and participation of all citizens:

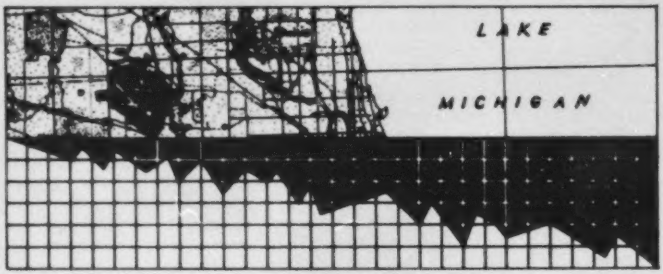
> As schools continue to have a smaller clientele, it becomes even more important to solicit the participation of parents so that schools can provide other services to adults in order to maintain public confidence and support of the schools.

FOOTNOTES

Twenty Years of Crisis: Shrinking Enrollment in the Salt Lake City School District

1. **National Committee for Citizens in Education,** *Who Controls the Schools?* (Columbia, Md: NCCE, 1978), Chapter IV, "A Sample Council."
2. The state and district work together to finance the minimum basic program at $795 per pupil. Under this system, the district levies up to 28 mills—except during state-initiated property value reappraisals—to pay for the district's share of the basic program. The state then pays the balance. As reappraisals by the state change the amount collected in taxes, the levy drops for a period of four years after reappraisal but, over those four years, it then follows steps back up to 28 mills.
3. The district can seek a voted leeway of up to ten mills. This added money can be used for class size reduction, extra library help, instrumental music programs, and so on.
4. Capital financing pays for building projects, major renovations and equipment. A basic leeway, available to the board for capital financing, does not require a citizen vote, but additional leeways must be voted by citizens. Harmer has said that he knows of no instance where a board has had to request a vote for additional funds.

5. Categorical funds are granted to a district by federal and state governments and agencies for specific objectives such as classes for the handicapped and disadvantaged, transportation money, and programs for adult high school completion.



SKOKIE TRIES TO CLOSE A SCHOOL

Civia Tamarkin

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In 1978, Skokie, Illinois put itself on the map, snaring world-wide attention as it fought with all the legal weaponry it could muster to block American Nazi party members from marching down Skokie's main street. Though the challenge played down to a bittersweet outcome—a federal court ruling upheld Nazi rights but self-styled Fuhrer Frank Collin and his brown-shirted followers voluntarily took their march elsewhere—Skokie still prized a victory. Any regrets over the faded glory of a win by default were overshadowed by the community's triumph and impressive showing of support; Skokie residents rallied as a unified bloc. It was a brief

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second wind for an aging community. A last hurrah for the once-called "Village of Vision."

Coming in the midst of a local education crisis caused by declining student enrollment and forced school closings, the Skokians' rousing rally surprised some onlookers and long-time resident activists. Of late, Skokie had suffered from middle-aged complacency. A former boomtown suburb hugging Chicago's northwest shoulder, Skokie seemed to have lost its spunk. Critics claim that this preponderantly Jewish suburb could not have pulled together for any other reason but the proposed Nazi march. The town that had protested so vehemently in that showdown raised only a faint yelp when its high school superintendent and board orchestrated the shutdown of a mainspring school. The town that once boasted a fiery political caucus and a government that did everything for its citizens but wipe their noses had seemingly turned off to its schools. "Everyone is getting old in Skokie and couldn't care less," says a 25-year resident. Echoes another Skokian, "Our village had such a forward-looking outlook. Now it needs bifocals."

A former Native American village and fur trading center, Skokie made its mark at the turn of the century as the set for the Essanay Film Company's two-reeler westerns. At one time or another, Ben Turpin, Gloria Swanson, Wallace Beery and the Keystone Cops pantomimed their way through Skokie's dusty streets. While the greater part of Illinois was becoming a vast cornfield, Skokie and the adjacent towns were cultivating truck gardens to supply the rapidly growing Chicago market.

In the mid-twenties, Skokie's prairie town image vanished, along with the film crews, as a tide of migration surged out of Chicago. The depression then brought everything to a halt and World War II kept construction at a standstill for another ten years. But, after the war, Skokie became a haven for light industry fleeing Chicago's transportation problems and high taxes. The critical post-war housing shortage gave Skokie its real spurt in the fifties. Real estate developments blossomed as city dwellers with young families poured into the suburb in search of their version of the American Dream. Farms gave way to subdivisions of split-level and ranch-style homes. Ma and Pa grocery stores moved aside for shopping malls. Only six percent of Skokie's acreage remained vacant as its population tripled to 70,000 residents. In the mid-sixties, Skokie declared itself the world's largest village.

This relatively wealthy, relatively homogeneous, very White suburban community took on its tasks as well as its distinctions. No efforts or funds were spared to meet the needs of its people. Says long-time resident Phyllis Young, "Everything was done the hardest and most expensive way. There was tremendous spirit." The legions of highly paid professionals and skilled workers that plunked down their nest eggs on a piece of suburbia were determined to make Skokie work, to guarantee a well-serviced lifestyle for their families and a sound return on their investments.

Skokie's Schools

Education was a chief target of Skokie's ambitions. In the fifties, when the number of children under age ten rose from 2,500 to 10,500, referendums hastily added schools to the elementary network. When Niles Township High School, built in 1938 to accommodate a maximum of 1200 students, groaned under the weight of its feeder schools and was forced into double sessions, Skokians moved swiftly to ease the pressure. A string of additions brought capacity up to 2,000 and two new high schools—Niles West in 1958 and Niles North in

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1964—lessened the load. By 1969-1970, the district's high school enrollment numbered over 8,000. With enrollment climbing and expected to peak in 1975, Skokie stopped the gap with pre-fabricated portable classrooms and began scouting sites for a fourth high school.

Meanwhile, Skokie was just as concerned about quality in education as with physical space. Niles Township's high schools won acclaim as top-level educational centers. Each of the three schools functioned independently of the others and fostered its own innovations in programming and curriculum. There were open campuses, non-graded classes, course-audit options, college-credit placement subjects, well-stocked elective sequences and four-year offerings in subjects like Russian and Hebrew. The schools even stacked up well against criteria that school boards boast about when good, and play down when bad: National Merit finalists were numerous; sizeable percentages of graduates moved on to well-recognized universities; a presidential scholar or two happened along; and, the music and athletic departments managed to walk away from competitions with a fair share of awards. Unfortunately, these achievements were overshadowed by proximity to internationally known academic giants like Evanston Township and New Trier High Schools. Says an education writer for a Skokie newspaper:

> In any other locale, our high schools would have been considered outstanding. But they have always come off as a weak stepsister to these other two school systems.

Nevertheless, Niles Township's high schools adhered to their upward course and dominated center stage in the community. In 1970, when three Niles East teachers were fired for controversial teaching practices, Skokie's entire citizenry mobilized into two camps. Hundreds of people packed the school auditorium and jammed the corridors while the school board hearings were in session. The students staged a one-day walk-out and everyone took sides, feeling that "as the high schools go, so goes the community."

Then the tide shifted. Quietly and gradually the high schools began to lose ground. After 1969, actual enrollment contradicted the optimistic projections of professional visionaries and went steadily downhill. The initial drop of 100 students was compounded each year. The children who were products of the fifties' population boom were growing up and their parents were growing older. More important, the older families were not moving. There was nowhere for them to go in the inflated housing market. Skokie not only priced itself out of reach of prospective young homeowners, but earned a reputation as a conservative gray-haired community, so young people began to seek out other suburbs.

Class size held fairly constant at thirty—in line with union bargaining agreements—but declining enrollment did affect the curriculum. Foreign language programs suffered the worst casualties. Latin was eliminated as a major offering. Russian and Hebrew slid from four-year programs at all three schools to two-year sequences offered at only one school; eventually, they were dropped entirely. At the same time, advanced college placement courses in biology, physics and chemistry were whittled down by half or two-thirds, while music, art, and even athletic departments faced losses. For some subjects, classes were kept alive by busing students among schools to maintain sufficient enrollment. Once crowded courses became question marks on semester schedules as both students and teachers waited until the first day of school to find out if a given class would stretch to acceptable size. Teachers were laid off and departmental enterprise scaled down; a stale sameness crept into all three high school curricula, replacing the diversity and ingenuity that had given birth to top-notch academics.

Effects of Decline

Declining enrollment took a surprisingly harsh toll. Seemingly, the situation should have played in reverse. As the pre-1969 student swell had squeezed classrooms, overloaded programs, doubled sessions and made construction of a new school imminent, the student rollback should have been a welcome relief. More than a return to normalcy, it could have allowed schools the first-time luxury of operating at optimum capacity. The enrollment decrease could have primed the schools for resource and program development. With the problem of physical space no longer dominating finances or administrative brainpower, curriculum advances could have come to the fore.

But an overcast economic front created a different climate. Soaring operating costs and stagnant school revenues stacked the odds against educational gains. While the number of students was decreasing, maintenance and utility fees, salaries and the cost of educational materials escalated. As state and federal funds only accounted for ten percent of the district's revenue, any reduction in these funds resulting from per capita student decreases made little difference in the overall school budget scheme. What critically squeezed the high school district's economic support was the township's actual taxable wealth, against which the school board made its levies. Personal property had been removed from the tax rolls and, even more important, tax rates had not increased at all since 1973 when the state government lowered the multiplier for assessed values. Niles Township High School District, which had always been among the wealthier districts in the state relative to tax-

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able assessed value per student, was stuck with a far below-average total school tax rate—under two dollars per hundred dollars assessed valuation. The total assessed value remained unchanged after 1972; despite annual inflationary costs, there were no more dollars to run the schools than there had been in earlier years.

Disinterest combined with the mounting monetary crunch to plague the high schools. In what appeared to be a fall from community grace, Niles Township high schools, after almost two decades of superstar standing, dropped to the sidelines of public concern. Pride waned as student achievement leveled off. (Swept up in a nationwide phenomenon of the early seventies, Niles Township high schools had poorer college-entrance test scores, fewer National Merit finalists and more graduates opting for junior colleges than for major universities.) Parent involvement also took a downturn after a series of no-win clashes with the school board over such issues as student unrest, growing teacher union militancy and the unpopular firing of three controversial teachers. The teacher dismissals, in particular, left a residue of bitter community feelings. Parents who had supported the teachers felt the board acted unilaterally and unjustly, while parents who favored the ouster of the allegedly radical instructors turned their backs on the high schools, claiming they were too powerful and exerted a "harmful outside influence" over the children. Many parents, feeling they had lost touch with their own children, blamed the schools for turning out long-haired, pot-smoking political extremists.

Community participation in the high schools ebbed as the embattled school board, finding itself constantly at odds with various community groups, retreated into a closed body. The situation did not improve when the school board hired Dr. Wesley Gibbs, former elementary district superintendent, as the high school superintendent. Forty-seven non-tenured teachers were let go during his first year as superintendent. One critic describes the worsening conditions for citizen participation at that time:

> You can only expect people's attention span to last for so long. After a while people stopped coming to school board meetings, feeling it just wasn't worth the time. Nothing was accomplished and they grew tired of beating their heads against the wall and getting the run-around.

Perhaps a younger, more vibrant Skokie would have stood its ground. But the tax-paying population was aging, the majority falling between 40 and 60 years old. With their children either off in college or out on their own, few people found cause for concern in the schools. Facing the prospect of retirement, Skokie's increasingly older population was determined to hold onto its pocketbooks. Between 1973 and 1975, seven out of eight referendums to raise elementary school taxes were defeated. The same people who had once drummed up enthusiastic support for the high schools now canvassed their neighborhoods to get voters to oppose these referendums. One woman says:

> The change was startling. For example, my neighbor has three grown children who went through the high schools and she used to be right there with all the fund-raising activities—bake sales and all. But, during the last bond issue she was out ringing bells to get it defeated.

The high school board itself reflected the downshift in community interest. The lawyers, doctors and white-collar professionals who had manned the board in earlier years vacated their seats. The empty spaces were filled, in many instances, by non-professionals. According to some long-time school observers, the board's policy and decision-making powers suffered under the new membership. "Unlike the professionals who preceded them, [those] who got on the board ended up being overly intimidated by the experts and the educators," notes a disgruntled Skokian. A few stalwart citizen watchdogs accused the board of lacking focus, acting as an administrative puppet and foot-dragging on vital issues. But an indifferent community failed to do anything until late 1974, when charges of the board's ignoring children's safety stirred up parents and touched off the events that led to the announced closing of Niles East High School.

Considered a country-club campus when it was first built, Niles East began showing signs of wear. Its athletic facilities deteriorated so badly that, by 1974, the school's accreditation with the Illinois High School Athletic Association was threatened. The school's swimming pool was labeled unsafe, the diving board condemned and swim meets forbidden. In addition, athletic facilities at the other two high schools needed updating and expansion to serve the growing demands of women's competitive sports and give Niles Township athletes a home advantage equal to that of other suburban league teams. For years, parents of athletes and armchair boosters had attended board meetings en masse to raise interest in improving athletic facilities. Finally, in an emotional exchange accusing the board of jeopardizing student safety, they backed the board into a corner and forced it to act. They reminded the board that while it had approved some improvements, like a new swimming pool, and slated them for state funding long ago, it had never followed through on these actions. The board reacted by appointing an investigative committee of 31 parents, students and school officials to look into the high school district's athletic needs.

On a fall evening in 1974, fireworks exploded at the Niles Township High School Board meeting when its blue-ribbon investigative committee laid out a package of nearly $2.8 million for various improvements in physical education facilities at the three schools. Amid a volley of objections calling the committee's plan "extravagant, inflationary and irresponsible," the board tabled the report. Then, to the surprise of the audience and its own dissident members, the board directed Superintendent Gibbs to look into future enrollment projections and considerations for closing schools should enrollment continue to decline. Irate parents, citing a number of injuries at the Niles East pool, accused the board of intentionally stalling renovations. Board member Evelyn Rosenzweig drew a round of audience applause when she admonished the board for "playing games with the community." "I can't understand what is holding up the building of the pool at East," she continued. "Right now the architect is in limbo on a project that should have been started long ago."

Unbeknown to the public, the rapidly snowballing increase in declining enrollment was holding up improvements for the three district high schools. Hastily called in experts projected an end-of-the-decade drop of nearly 32 percent from the 1969-1970 peak. The 1974 enrollment of 7,432 students was expected to fall to 5,503 in 1979-1980 with a subsequent drop to 3,201 students by 1986. The public was caught completely off guard because it had been kept in the dark by a school board which functioned behind closed doors. The evidence was in—enrollment would fall well below the 7,950 student capacity of the three $13 million high schools. Parents knew enrollment was down somewhat because they saw cutbacks in curriculum, but the problem had been waved off as a temporary fluctuation, the normal ups-and-downs of population growth. No one was aware that the enrollment decline represented a dramatic, seemingly irreversible shift in population until the debate over capital improvements brought the issue to the surface.

The board's decision to tackle a school closing had all the markings of a precipitous act. The big unanswered question was: why did it appear to come so suddenly? Why did the demographers not find evidence of decline earlier? In fact, why did they project such a big increase? Two previous high school superinendents were said to be shocked at the enrollment disclosures and the idea of closing a school. Similarly, board member Evelyn Rosenzweig admits, "The whole thing hit me by surprise." Mrs. Rosenzweig, now board president, says:

> At the time I was baffled. I didn't see signs of the decline in any reduction of the budget, which was increasing each year, and I saw no attempt to cut deficit spending. I still believe the board could have waited to act on a school closing and there certainly could have been a better public relations program for the community.

Superintendent Gibbs adds:

> With the left hand we were doing major life-saving improvements and long-range planning to keep the schools in top shape. At the same time, we were doing enrollment projections that showed we would be down to 5000 students in the early 1980's.

Galen Hosler, an all-around utility administrator plugged in as principal of Niles East after the school closing episode, also notes, "It wasn't clear how quick the decline was coming."

Two or Three Schools?

Once the idea of a high school shutdown loomed on the horizon, the board reacted quickly, too quickly in the opinion of many Skokians. In January 1975, as the board was considering closing one Niles Township high school, Gibbs presented a 55-page report entitled "Two or Three Schools?" in which he attempted to look at both sides of the question.

While his report claimed to address value questions, it was weighted with economic factors and carried a foregone conclusion—one high school must be closed. He estimated that revenues would increase about one percent annually, while expenditures would increase by three percent a year. Gibbs projected a deficit of about $2.3 million in the district's budget by 1980, and he asserted that the district could save more than $2.5 million annually by closing any one of its three high schools.

On the other hand, he warned, educational program quality had also to be considered in any decision. In discussing the desirability of keeping three schools, Gibbs cited research studies illustrating the benefits of smaller schools. Among those benefits: closer student-teacher relationships and more opportunities for student involvement, leadership and recognition. Gibbs, however, devoted less than one-tenth of his report to the academic, social and intellectual advantages of maintaining three smaller schools.

Critics believe that the promise of cash savings immediately settled the board's mind. Nevertheless, the board went through all the motions of fair play—calling a public hearing for March, inviting PTA and homeowner groups to express their opinions and directing the administration to distribute summaries of Gibbs's report throughout the community. Yet the board's sentiments seemed to be reflected by one of its members, Eric Moch. While supporting a public hearing, he emphasized that the board should not be swayed by community reaction or protest to a school closing, "In the last analysis, the decision is the board's and we can't get the answer done for us." (Moch also wrote three years later in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper that "the closing decision stands as a classic case of democracy in action.")

Later, in March, at a public hearing attended by 200 to 300 people, 18 people addressed the board. One man, drawn to the hearing by what he called "a very explosive issue," suggested that the board had already decided its course of action and that Gibbs's report "is still another public relations document to pacify the community." A representative from the Niles Township Federation of Teachers delivered a strong attack on Gibbs's conclusions, claiming that the projected savings from a school closing were exaggerated and that the proposals were not made with a view to saving teachers' jobs. Says Robert Feder, an editor for the Lerner Newspapers:

> Citizen participation in the matter of a school closing was the board's greatest failing. The public hearing was a farce. Written statements requested by the board and submitted in lieu of public speeches were never read and recommendations were never followed up.

The school board did not take any action following the hearing nor did it make any formal decision to vacate a building. It did schedule negotiations with the board of nearby Oakton Community College on the possibility of leasing a school. There was never any debate over which school to close. School board president Shirley Garland repeatedly insisted that one specific school had not been designated and that any one of the three could be chosen. But the community's conclusion that Niles East, oldest and smallest of the three, was the target was reinforced every time the motion for improving the hazardous swimming pool was defeated. And, when the board voted on the issue of school closing, Niles East was chosen.

"That's what made me so angry," says Sue Bernstein, mother of a Niles East student and leader of the small group that fought against closing. She continued:

> I didn't like the way the choice of Niles East was handled. I felt the board had no rationale, no long-range plan and merely went along on the reasoning that East was the oldest.

Wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan "Save Niles East," and distributing fliers and posters stating, "West is best, East is least and North is air-conditioned," the Bernstein opposition group tried to gather support. Bernstein was sure people would rush to save the school which had built the district's academic reputation. If sentiment was not enough, then fiscal foresight should have spurred on opposition; the board's decision to cast off the aged school preceded any sound evaluation of how to dispose of the vacant building. The board assumed that the local community college would grab the space. "The board acted hastily, without considering which school was most marketable," notes Bernstein, adding that Niles North, with its large parking lot and location adjacent to a shopping center, would have been the most saleable space.

The school board president, however, was unyielding in pushing through the Niles East closing, the dissenting minority was overriden, and the board voted four to two to close the school in September 1980. The two dissenters had wanted a public referendum, maintenance of a balanced budget, exploration of alternative uses for the schools and an implementation plan for school closing.

The board's vote triggered almost no reaction. "The old activists were too tired and browbeaten to raise a fuss," sighs one observer.

One critic claims the entire school closing was engineered to preclude opposition. By singling out Niles East first, two-thirds of the opposition—the parent population at the other two schools—was eliminated immediately. By planning the closing five years into the future, the board further protected itself against ringside opponents. How do you mobilize opposition from parents whose kids are still in elementary school? No one disagreed with the board's argument that sufficient time and preparation are necessary for any school closing; criticism of the timing of Niles East's shutdown stemmed from the feeling that the board did not do enough groundwork to justify its decision.

The mechanics of implementing Niles East's closing aroused greater response than the closing itself. The requisite redistricting of feeder elementary schools presented the most problems. Nine autonomous elementary districts fed into one high school district. Each district vied for its own self-interest in the school closing plan. "There was less outcry over the closing than over where new attendance boundaries would be drawn. Some of the redistricting was not sensible at all," says Sue Bernstein. She also noted that the school board typically solicited suggestions for proposed boundaries, gave them perfunctory weight and finally concocted its own plan.

In approving the school closing, the high school board adopted a seven-point position paper in which it promised to retain all tenured faculty members, go to "extraordinary lengths to assure quality programs" for students at Niles East until the 1980 closing, seek alternative use for the Niles East building as an educational or cultural facility, and review its plans by scheduling a reassessment of its entire position in June 1976.

Many residents feel the board failed to live up to its promises. For one thing, the closing plan was never reassessed. For another, some allege that the board and administration have not made a strong effort to hold on to tenured teachers; the possibility of non-seniority firings caused a teacher strike in 1976. Some people are upset by the board's policy of "staff reductions by normal attrition," a policy which includes liberal leaves and early retirement incentives. There have also been complaints that the weeding-out process was helped along by curriculum adjustments which left disgruntled teachers looking elsewhere for jobs. The high school district's faculty has grown lean in what one observer describes as "a mass exodus from a sinking ship." Finally, Niles East parents are disturbed by the vagueness of the board's commitment to "go to extraordinary lengths to assure quality programs." As program and teacher cuts continue, bewildered parents are still pressing the board for a clear-cut policy.

Preparing for Closing

Two board-designated committees have set the ground rules for the upcoming high school closing. Committee I, consisting of administrators from all three high schools, the district business manager, two teacher representatives, citizen representatives, one East High student and two junior high students, is cataloging suggestions and developing procedures to cover every facet of the closing. Five different subcommittees are charged with covering all bases, from student participation in school government, clubs and extra-curricular activities to faculty assignments and even distribution or disposal of furniture, equipment and library stock. Plans have already been mapped out for East athletes to move into varsity teams at North and West, for music and drama groups to merge and for positions such as editorships of school newspapers to be shared wherever possible.

Committee II, made up of school administrators, the district director of building and grounds, a representative of a property owners' association and experts on real estate and village planning, has the task of finding an alternative use for or disposing of buildings and sites at Niles East and the district's Central Administration.A string of possibilities has backfired: Oakton Community College did not snap up the property; the park district passed up the space claiming it was too expensive to maintain; and, neither the parochial schools nor the university extension programs show any interest in renting the space. The most recent, desperate proposal was to bulldoze the school and sell the land to a condominium developer.

Committee II coaxed the board into hiring a real estate consulting service that has charged the district close to $11,000 without producing results. "The school board is dying with this building," muses newsman Feder. Whatever it eventually decides, the committee will undoubtedly move cautiously, fully aware that it is grappling with the most loaded issue of all. Next to taxes, the chief concern of Skokians is property values.

To prepare further for the closing, the school board has mandated curriculum changes to create consistent offerings and requirements in all three schools. English and social studies courses have already been pulled together and given identical names, grade standards and course objectives. Many teachers say programs were decimated in the interest of uniformity, while graduating students at all the schools are concerned about the effect course and grading changes will have on class rank and college enrollment.

The shutdown of an old institution is never painless but, in the case of Niles East, the community might have accepted and understood its closing more easily had it been more involved in making the decision. At present,

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the new high school board seems to be headed toward a more favorable public image as it makes a real effort to correct past mistakes and restore good relations with the community. Members elected since 1976 have campaigned specifically on the platform of making the board more responsive to the public. This summer, the board voted to permit community members to address the board on agenda topics at any time during regular meetings. This action reversed the board's longstanding policy and met with the strong disapproval of former board member Eric Moch who stated:

> ...the Board of Education sits in public, conducts its business in public, but does not sit with the public. In other words, a meeting of the Board of Education is not a town meeting...

In the three years following the announced school closing, public enrollment in the high school district has fallen steadily, keeping pace with the board's earlier projections. The village of Skokie hopes to recoup its population losses and reverse its enrollment decline however. A Chicago-based public relations firm has developed a comprehensive marketing plan entitled "Skokie Spirit" to entice young families into the area and undo the image of Skokie as a stagnant community. Unfortunately, most residents are not too optimistic about the outcome. They fear the 1980 closing of Niles East will be followed by a Niles North closing in 1985.

The Niles East closing marks an inevitable phase in the life span of a first-ring suburban community. Skokians know they are not alone. Their suburb is just among the first to confront declining high school enrollments. Chuckles long-time resident Phyllis Young, "We're leading the country in the problem of declining enrollment just as we led back in the 1950's with the building boom."

UPDATE

(Based on information provided by Robert Feder of the Lerner Newspapers.)

While the high school board had voted in 1975 to close Niles East in 1980, it became apparent by autumn of 1978 that no buyer could be found for the building. Oakton Community College refused to consider taking Niles East—even for as little as one dollar. The board, reasoning that declining enrollments would force closure of two high schools by 1984-1985, then entered into secret negotiations to sell Niles North to Oakton. Oakton responded enthusiastically with a $5.7 million offer but, when news of its offer became public, the Niles North community exploded. Residents protested the closed door negotiations between the two boards, the unacceptably low financial offer and the apparent reversal of the Niles East closing plan.

The Skokie community split into camps supporting either Niles East or Niles North, and Niles North's booster club brought suit to block the sale to Oakton. While public meetings and the newspaper debated the issue, a court order barred the Niles High School and Oakton Community College Boards from resuming negotiations. The judge later lifted this injunction, requiring that all discussion be held in public, but the high school board decided to drop all discussions with Oakton.

The board has now reaffirmed its plan to close Niles East in 1980 and focus on alternative uses for that facility. Its latest plan: develop a community cultural arts center with the help of federal and state grants. An update of the demographers' report indicates that Niles North may have to close as early as 1983, but the board has yet to take formal action.

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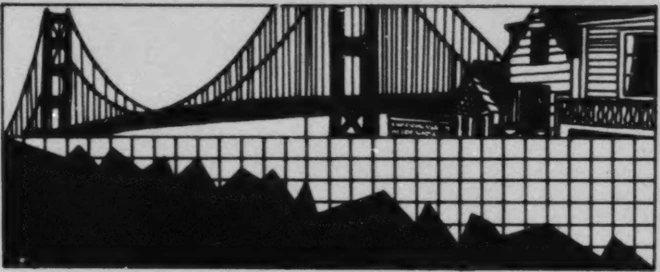

CLOSING SCHOOLS, BAY AREA STYLE

Jean L. Jessner

Jean L. Jessner is a freelance editor and writer, and a long time activist in the Berkeley schools. A former teacher, she was coordinator of the New Schools Network, a clearinghouse for public and private alternative schools.

San Francisco evokes images of steep hills, cold summer fog, the Golden Gate Bridge and cable cars; Berkeley, the University of California and the student activism of the sixties; and Palo Alto, citywide bicycle paths and the peaceful quadrangle of Stanford University. These popular images are not untrue, but the three communities' realities are much more complex.

Over the past decade, San Francisco, like other American cities, has experienced a shift in the racial mix of its citizens and much migration to the suburbs. Urban poverty is juxtaposed to great wealth; city politics are riddled with conflicts between the old order and the new, between those who operate from traditional bases of power and those previously unrepresented who now want a piece of the action, a share of the power. San

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Francisco writer, Herbert Gold, sums up these conflicts very well:

> The old buccaneers and the new ones tend to get as much of everything as they can use. The buccaneers get one heck of a lot, and those at the bottom—blacks, Hispanics, recent immigrants, the poor—get, uh, very careful consideration.

The resident university is the major industry in both Berkeley and Palo Alto and, in statistical terms, both cities are wealthier than the average community. The ever-increasing cost of housing, food and taxes in Berkeley has driven away most families with less than a lower middle-class income. The cost of living in Palo Alto has always been high, even for the Bay Area. In the past few years, it has risen so high that most families with school-age children find it impractical to settle there.

These three school districts are considered wealthy because, in the past, they have spent much more than —usually twice as much as—the state average per pupil. Palo Alto has depended heavily on local tax revenues to support its schools while Berkeley and San Francisco have supplemented local tax revenues with every state and federal assistance program possible. Money from these programs has often allowed the two districts to create the illusion of smooth management. As these sources dry up, however, that illusion has been broken, and these districts have resorted to unpopular actions such as teacher layoffs, curriculum cutbacks and now school closings to maintain some sort of fiscal stability.

Berkeley and San Francisco have witnessed formation of advisory committees to legitimate school closing decisions already made by their school boards. Lack of administrative cooperation in providing accurate information has dismayed committee members and prevented them from making sound recommendations. The result: no concrete options other than school closings can be explored, and citizens become angry and frustrated. Reporter Walter Blum quotes one San Francisco parent at the hearings:

> I will work with the system. But when it do not include me in it I have to do my own thing. You know when we asked you to close this school down many years ago, the Board of Education refused to do so. We asked you for black education and English as a Second Language, but you refused to do that. Then we started to fight, and you made it a second language, and we got the kind of school we wanted. Now you want to close us down. . . We doin' a damned good job here. . . It's goin to be a helluva fight. . .if you take this school away. ("California Living," *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle Magazine,* April 30, 1978.)

Berkeley, San Francisco and Palo Alto have three things in common: fewer students are attending schools; less money is available to operate the schools; and, school officials are determined to close schools as a way of saving money. The central problem of money has also been intensified by the financial crisis generated by Proposition 13, the California initiative which will reduce school revenues by one-third to one-half over the next few years.

Each of the three districts has its own political tradition produced by and reflected in its past dealings with its community and its own definition of good operations. The district's political tradition then determines how each district responds to fiscal pressures, how it makes decisions, and how each constituency will participate in those decisions.

PALO ALTO

In the past, most Palo Alto residents have found the school administration's management of their district satisfactory because the district's goals have coincided with the community's. Recognition of common goals has led citizens to trust the data supplied by the district staff to the school board and citizens' advisory committees. These committees, usually districtwide and comprising citizens, teachers and administrators, have accustomed those three constituencies to working together. Having received the data needed to make sensible recommendations and having had their recommendations taken seriously, these advisory committees have felt that their time and energies were well spent.

Compared to Berkeley's 50 percent and San Francisco's 23 percent White student populations, Palo Alto, with an 88 percent White population, is not significantly multiracial. Desegregation of students and hiring of minority staff have not been seen as pressing issues; nor has the racial makeup of Palo Alto's presently all-White school board been seriously challenged at election time. In fact, board elections have usually been noncontroversial and members of the school community have attended school board meetings regularly, not just during crises.

In 1976, Newman Walker, Palo Alto's present superintendent, came from a successful term as chief of the turbulent Louisville, Kentucky school district, where he had won national recognition as an educational leader, to head a school district less politically troubled and more adequately budgeted than San Francisco or Berkeley. Palo Alto had a largely homeogenous school population, high student scores, small schools and classes, abundant materials, and high teacher salaries. Relatively small amounts of money for the schools came from private foundations, compensatory programs for economically disavantaged students, or federal and state programs requiring matching funds. Palo Alto voters supported their schools handsomely.

On the other hand, Palo Alto's small school enrollment of 11,500 was declining by about 400 students a year. When Walker came to Palo Alto, he knew that schools would have to be closed and close them he did. Only an occasional grumble met the closing of three elementary schools. Their facilities were leased on a yearly basis to two private schools and a Jewish community center. Leasing public school buildings and possibly aiding the competition did not appear to disturb the district's residents. (Of course, zoning also limits the ways in which any surplus school facilities can be used.)

As Palo Alto closed schools, it made the transition easier for students and staff by thoroughly preparing them and maintaining each school's unique programs whenever possible. A smooth transition is also expected when three additional elementary schools and one high school close in accordance with the consolidation forecast by Palo Alto's Project Redesign. (Funded in part by the National Institute of Education, Project Redesign was a long-range planning and goal-setting project involving thousands of adult residents, students and school employees. One of its goals: reduce the number of school buildings in use. One outcome of this novel project was the division of the district into three clusters, each made up of several elementary schools, one middle school, and a high school.)

Snags At Ventura

One important controversy stands out in the generally tranquil climate surrounding school closings in Palo Alto—the case of Ventura Elementary School. The problems that arose there might well foreshadow future difficulties.

A careful look at Ventura will make it easier to understand the controversy over its closing. The neighborhood served by Ventura has Palo Alto's highest percentage of households on public assistance as well as a high percentage of working mothers and single parent families. Few own their own homes, and small apartment houses and small businesses abound. It is an area of mixed ethnicity, and 51 percent of Ventura's students are minority group members. In 1968, Ventura was labelled a "problem school" because Ventura students' test scores were low for Palo Alto, vandalism was a conspicuous problem, and racial mistrust accompanied many misunderstandings among the students.*

To improve Ventura's situation, Dr. William Glasser, consultant in the field of education and youth correctional institutions, was brought in to work with the staff to develop a school where, as he said, "the kids can really feel a sense of dignity and that they are accepted." Student-teacher conferences became frequent as teachers became committed to individualized attention and parents became as involved in school programs as their work schedules would allow. By 1978, the Ventura school was proud of itself and its achievements; it referred to itself as a "jewel" of integration. Many teachers wanted to teach there because "the group was working so well together." It's "not artificial, it's voluntary, it just happened naturally," said one teacher after her first (and probably last) year at Ventura.

Why close Ventura then? Project Redesign called for closing one school in the Ventura area cluster so that

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*R.K. Meyer, S. Klein and M.E. Boyar, "Study of the Barron Park/Ventura School Closure Issue." Stanford University, 1968. (Mimeographed.)

Palo Alto could reduce its 22 elementary schools to a more financially manageable number. For a time, Ventura's unique character excluded it from the list of candidates for closure. But the situation changed when nearby Barron Park Elementary School caught fire and part of its structure suffered serious damage. Barron Park students had to be distributed among nearby schools and the school board had to decide whether to close or rebuild the school. Few Barron Park students chose to go to Ventura; most went to schools with a racial mix similar to Barron Park's 90 percent White composition.

Barron Park had been an unincorporated community, but it had joined Palo Alto a short time ago. With a median income slightly higher than the rest of Palo Alto, Barron Park residents take pride in their community's all-residential character. Eight days after the school fire, residents of the area formed the Barron Park Neighborhood School Committee and presented the school board with a petition signed by 500 people urging the board to rebuild rather than close Barron Park's school. The committee also took on neighboring Ventura by claiming that Ventura's enrollment was declining faster than Barron Park's and Ventura was illegally segregated. If any school had to go, they reasoned, it might as well be Ventura.

At first the school board gave in to Barron Park's demands: it decided to reconsider its earlier decision to close the school in the aftermath of its fire. Superintendent Walker asked for time to explore the issue and promised to make his recommendation on February 7, 1978. At this point, the numbers game began. Each school tried to prove that the other failed to satisfy objective criteria for remaining open. Each one had 209 students in 1977-1978. The points at issue were which school's enrollment was declining more rapidly and, with projections into the future, which would decline the most. Parents and officials knew that the answers to these questions were critical.

In the Barron Park-Ventura contest, segregation also became an issue, albeit a misleading one. Because Palo Alto has an open enrollment policy, any child can attend any school in the district as long as he or she is self-transporting. There is some busing because previous school closings have made "neighborhood" schools more distant, but most students attend the school nearest home. A small vocal group representing various racial and ethnic backgrounds wanted their children to attend a multicultural school in the system, so they sent them crosstown to Ventura.

Some argued that Ventura was segregated because it had a proportion of minority students higher than the districtwide average of 12 percent. This claim was then used to support arguments for closing Ventura. Later, however, the courts ruled out Ventura's higher percentage of minority students as an indicator of illegal segregation because the grouping is officially voluntary and no one racial group significantly outnumbers another.

Two unique circumstances mark the Ventura case. All earlier decisions to close schools had been made after a districtwide committee had met over a period of time, explored alternatives, and sent its recommendations to the school board and superintendent. In the case of Ventura, though, a shortage of time appeared to prohibit exploring alternatives and conducting lengthy deliberations. Some parents were involved in the decision-making process because the board appointed a committee, made up largely of representatives from the two competing groups with the addition of some outside parties, to make recommendations. But there were few buffers. Each group countered the other's statistics and arguments while trying to reach a decision. As *Palo Alto Times* education reporter Mark Salgado noted, "This was the first time that two school groups had been pitted against each other."

Not surprisingly, the two competing groups presented different plans to school officials at the February 7 board meeting. Plan I called for closing Barron Park and sending its students to Loma Vista, a newer school which had not been considered for closing because it was specially equipped for orthopedically handicapped students. Plan II would have rebuilt Barron Park by 1979 and closed Ventura at that time, sending all Ventura students to Barron Park. Superintendent Walker agreed with Plan II, in part because the district could not collect fire insurance on Barron Park unless it were to be reopened. Walker expressed the hope that the two committees would cooperate with one another during the transition. The board agreed with the superintendent and, in March 1978, decided to close Ventura Elementary School at the end of 1979.

One Ventura parent, Denny Petrosian, responded:

> Keeping Barron Park open another year and rebuilding it would cost taxpayers approximately $200,000 over and above the insurance reimbursement money. Each previous school closure had *saved* the district as much as this was going to cost: on the average, $199,000 had been saved with each previous school closure.

She also countered Barron Park's claim that Ventura's enrollment was declining faster than Barron Park's. Petrosian cited Palo Alto Unified School District figures on enrollment loss for the six years ending in 1978 to the effect that Barron Park's enrollment was declining twice as fast as Ventura's.

The board's decision came after Judge William Fernandez lifted his restraining order arising from a suit brought by the Friends of Ventura. This group had feared "irreparable damage" in the event of a decision to close Ventura, and their suit was backed by eight civil rights organizations. These included: Asian-Americans for Community Involvement, the Puerto Rican Western Region Council, the Black Caucus of Santa Clara County, the Confederacion de la Raza Unida, the Intra-District Minority Committee of the Palo Alto Unified School District, the Mexican-American Community Service Agency, the Asian Law Alliance of Santa Clara County and the Japanese Citizens League of San Jose. (Incidentally, the Barron Park committee had also been prepared to sue the district had the decision gone against it; as it turned out, Barron Park was able to use the "thank you" letter it had prepared for the school board in the event of a favorable decision.) In May, Judge William Fernandez ruled that the Friends of Ventura did not have a case against the district. He issued a continuance until late July and the case remained in court through the summer of 1978.

Ventura's residents did not easily concede their loss however. They wanted their school. Denny Petrosian, who had moved to Ventura's neighborhood so her two daughters could attend the school, planned to continue to push the district to reconsider its move. She had been joined by a handful of others, and her view that Ventura supporters were "naive and gullible" in pushing for their school echoed their feelings. She and others had thought that Ventura would be treated as a special case:

> We simply didn't believe that [earlier policy statements by the superintendent that programs would not be considered as a factor in school closings] would be applied to us. After all, we had achieved what everyone wants to achieve. And we had a school that was so full of life. We certainly didn't expect that numbers and figures would be distorted to use against us.

Not only did Ventura parents feel that the decision against them was made on inaccurate, possibly manipulated data, they felt that the superintendent and all-White board treated them paternalistically. Petrosian said they were unwilling to listen seriously to Ventura parents or to review the data that parents had gathered when it conflicted with those of the administration.

Less distressed by the Ventura closure, but certainly saddened, was Opalene Mitchell, a district teacher for twelve years and a Ventura teacher last year. She remarked that the district "thought it would be easier to close Ventura than another school." Mitchell did look favorably, however, on plans for Barron Park and Ventura teachers and parents to meet throughout the year to make the eventual merger as educationally rewarding for students as possible. Jerry Schmidt, former Ventura principal and now principal of the consolidated school, was assigned to guide the merger. Despite their deep disappointment, parents also found this plan encouraging.

Some participants in the Ventura closing and some observers have raised an interesting question that could have resolved the issue happily for both groups: why not save each community's neighborhood school by having each school share space with another community service? Such an alternative might have brought additional revenue to the school district, provided more adults as resources to students, and allowed each school to preserve its distinctive character. Administrators in the district, however, seem to prefer schools to remain as schools only. As Assistant Superintendent John Martin explained, "Elementary school principals have gone on record as preferring closed schools. . .even with the loss of their principalships. . .to shared space."

BERKELEY

Berkeley's school population—10,000 to 11,500—is about the same as Palo Alto's. The two districts have been losing students at a comparable annual rate. The problems presented by declining enrollment in Berkeley are compounded, however, by a long history of public distrust of the school board and administration. Even within the school system there are problems: the school board and superintendent often publicly disagree with one another and with an array of city officials, community groups and teacher and service employee unions.

To appreciate the pitfalls of declining enrollment in Berkeley, it is important to understand the lingering effects of ten years and more of community strife over educational policy. While many other California communities have only begun to deal with citizen involvement in educational affairs, Berkeley has had a long history of citizen participation in school matters. Several years before implementation of its school desegregation plan—a voluntary policy initiated in 1968—the Berkeley schools held a series of citywide meetings to involve citizens in the planning process. During this period, officials solicited and heeded the public's suggestions, modifications and complaints. The voluntary program was not without its opponents, who mounted an unsuccessful campaign to recall the school board. But, by the time the plan was carried out in 1968, most interested segments of the community had participated in drawing up a plan which reflected their views and concerns.

The first feature of the school administration's Master Plan created a citywide ninth grade school, West Campus. Elementary schools were divided into K-3's located primarily in the affluent hills section and 4-6's in the middle to low-income flatland. The plan guaranteed that almost all students would be bused out of their home neighborhoods at some point in their elementary school careers. Finally, the school board adopted a policy of hiring staff to reflect the student body's racial composition and of upgrading recently hired minority teachers.

A Time of Experimentation

The late sixties in Berkeley were exciting years—a period of high political and social intensity as students and residents challenged the University of California's control of students, real estate and free speech. Vietnam war protests and the creation of alternatives to existing institutions flourished. Also, the school district kept pace with experimentation going on elsewhere in the city. The climate was ripe for alternative schools, small schools with programs devised by teachers, students and parents. These were designed in part to take integration a step further. By December 1970, Berkeley had six alternative public schools: Other Ways, a high school created by Herb Kohl, an early leader in the alternative school movement; Genesis, a secondary school created by teachers and students from Berkeley High; Black House, an offshoot of Genesis created by Black teachers and students; East Campus, a teacher-designed evolution of the continuation school; Odyssey, a junior high created by two teachers after a year of planning with students; and, Parents and Teachers for Alternative Education, a kindergarten through sixth grade school created by parents in consultation with assorted district teachers and community educators. It was a period of exploration and extensive citizen participation in the schools. Parents took part in selecting principals, defining educational goals and initiating new programs.

In 1970, the United States Office of Education offered Berkeley more than three million dollars to set up additional experimental schools and extend the existing experimental programs to a third of the city's students.

Community reaction was mixed. Many in the alternative school groups feared that such a large infusion of federal funds would undermine the autonomy and grassroots nature of their schools. Others in the city welcomed the prospect of additional funds for supplies and a lower staff-student ratio.

The school board, with two members who had only taken office that week, approved Superintendent Richard Foster's recommendation to accept the federal grant, even though members had not yet seen the final draft of the district's proposal. Some board members expressed misgivings about basing their vote on insufficient information and criticized the hastiness of their decision. A key question remained unanswered: would staff and teachers hired under the grant fall under regular tenure track provisions? Overstaffing problems which arose later on showed how important this question was, but Foster assured the board that the new staff would be temporary. He did so despite the California Education Code's prohibition against hiring teachers with second-class status. Only much later did Berkeley's board understand the consequences of its decision to accept federal funds: when the experimental schools money dried up in 1976, the district came up five million dollars short. Its finances were in an appalling state, and had been for some time, but the presence of federal aid had hidden this fact and enabled the district to postpone confrontation with its budget.

But in 1970, with the Office of Education grant virtually secured, word went out to the district that a large number of experimental schools would be created, possibly 22, over the next two years. Proposals—due in a little over three weeks—were solicited immediately, and some 55 were received. All sorts of citizen-parent-teacher combinations as well as administrative groups submitted proposals, but only plans prepared by school

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officials were chosen. Odyssey, Berkeley's only alternative junior high school, was not included in the packet of proposals the district chose to receive federal funds. When the Office of Education asked why Odyssey was so conspicuously excluded from the district's plans while junior high programs that had yet to be created were included, the Berkeley administration had no good answer. It quickly changed its plans and included Odyssey in the packet.

The design of the experimental school program required that students and parents choose a school and then participate in its management and educational program decisions. Choosing a school in which to participate was difficult. Not only were differences among schools unclear, but parents' and students' roles in decision-making were not specified. Whether participants could expect to play even advisory roles was never resolved, and that irresolution persisted in the ongoing struggle between administrators and the citizenry.

Seven years and five million dollars later there were fewer than two hundred students in the single remaining alternative shool, but the history of Berkeley's experimental schools is too complicated to address adequately in this chapter. What is important here is that, over the six-year experimental period, the Berkeley community's earlier enthusiasm and trust in the school board's and superintendent's ability to make educational decisions appropriate to the community vanished. Parents became alienated because they could not influence a decision-making process which affected their children directly and immediately. They decided to insist on participation and recognition in future district planning, but their efforts were in vain.

Closing Schools

In the summer of 1976, Dr. Laval Wilson, a young administrator from Long Island, New York, was appointed superintendent. He came to Berkeley, his first superintendency, during a period of turmoil and did little to quiet the controversies. Wilson upset many people by putting a moratorium on principal selection by parent-teacher committees, but a five-and-a-half week long teacher strike at the beginning of the 1976 school year overshadowed the widespread grumbling which met his moratorium. The teachers, pursuing their first pay raise in three years, also sought participation in program decisions. The school board, claiming a huge budget deficit but facing disbelief from teachers and many citizens, appointed a committee of local citizens, especially business people, to unravel the tangled budget and explain the district's finances to the community. Their explanation failed to convince many residents, however, because announced deficits had miraculously become surpluses in previous years. After the strike, when a settlement granted raises to teachers, the district found itself with less community confidence than ever.

The strike's crisis atmosphere had also overshadowed Wilson's announced intention to close four schools during the following school year. By the spring of 1977, only one of the four, an alternative K-3 school which housed an innovative preschool program, had closed. That school's Early Learning Center then moved to the small part of Willard Junior High left standing after the rest was demolished because it did not meet state earthquake standards.

The decision about use of the Willard building had sparked more controversy. Willard, the first junior high in the United States, was of architectural and historical interest. It was closed because it did not meet the specifications of California's Field Act for earthquake safety, and had either to be brought up to code or demolished. The school board majority, having considered no alternative other than maximum rehabilitation, voted to tear Willard down and build a new school with a low interest loan provided by the state to bring all school buildings up to code.

Representatives from many segments of the community disagreed with the board's plan. Professional architects from the community and from the University of California attempted to dissuade the board with plans and figures quite different from the district's. They and other rehabilitation proponents questioned both the district's environmental impact study and the fiscal wisdom of accepting a state loan for rebuilding which would cost more than rehabilitation. They argued that, in a time of decline with school closings already slated, alternate uses requiring no additional financial outlay should be considered. Two alternatives they proposed: house the administrative offices at Willard or rent the facility. Faced with this opposition, Superintendent Wilson withdrew his support for maximum rehabilitation, but the board never budged.

The community's bitterness over the Willard controversy has not receded. For one thing, neighboring San Francisco has been able to turn its historic Mission High School into a showcase of renovation to meet the Field Act's specifications. For another, the costs of rebuilding Willard have already exceeded the state loan's allotment. Willard is designated to reopen as a junior high school and some community members fear it will be used to resegregate Berkeley's secondary schools. The objection has also been made that rehabilitation began before the board had determined its purpose so that use was not a key factor in design.

Other schools had earthquake code defects, and many board members felt these should also be demolished and rebuilt. In these cases, however, neighborhood residents managed to persuade the board to renovate rather than rebuild, therby reducing the amount the district would owe the state. Why Willard is being rebuilt while the district proposes to close some schools, and why renovation proceeds on some buildings that may have to be closed in a few years remains unclear.

Citizens' Plan for the District

In the spring of 1977, Berkeley's school board created a Citizens' Master Plan Facilities Committee to recommend which schools to close. The criteria for appointment to this committee remain as mysterious as the district data the committee needs to complete its work. As the committee stated in its July 1977 report on criteria for closing schools, "It is essential that BUSD [Berkeley Unified School District] staff provide access to district data in order to adequately apply these criteria to our task." The committee then spelled out the financial, site and program criteria to be applied to school closing decisions.

Financial Criteria

- Operating costs per student per site
- Dollar savings from closing site
- Impact on special funding
- Effect on busing
- Age and condition of facility, especially modernization and maintenance requirements
- Predicted effect of specific site closure on ADA [Average Daily Attendance]

Site Criteria

- Quality of facility
- Alternative short- and long-term uses of sites and parts of sites
    - a. Possible BUSD administration uses
    - b. Possible non-BUSD uses

Program Criteria

- Optimum size of school enrollment
- Ability of program to be transferred and maintain its quality

The Berkeley committee's criteria also went one step further than those drawn up by most citizens' groups. It considered the effect of closing on the community as important as the three categories above.

Community Impact

- Present and projected demographic patterns of students
- Impact on neighborhood (social, psychological, ecological and economic)
- Impact of individual closings on zone

Much of the information that the committee requested from the district was either unavailable or inadequate, and the committee's frustration was reflected in its minutes and reports. Committee members have publicly expressed doubt that the data required by their criteria exist, and their September 1977 interim report referred explicitly to the limitations of district-provided information. The interim report also reflected several committee members' complaints that the district was unable to plan even a year ahead, and made a number of recommendations to "provide immediate direction and focus" to the district's plans for its 1978-1979 budget.

Noting that the district had eliminated more than 100 classrooms since 1970, the committee proposed no more site closings during the fall of 1978 and recommended closing portables as a way of reducing the number of classrooms. Although it recognized that the optimum size for a site might be considerably less, the committee set goals of not more than 350 pupils per site at the K-3 level and 650 pupils per site at the 4-6 level. Allowances for discretionary classroom space for program flexibility were also to be included in determining site capacity. Finally, the committee recommended immediate institution of a rezoning process to achieve racially balanced sites and classrooms.

In addition to making specific site-related recommendations, the committee addressed the district's need for information and planning. It observed:

- Closing a site does not generate immediate savings of any magnitude.
- Significant long-term savings occur primarily in the more efficient use of personnel.
- Cost savings, in any case, will be generated only if improved monitoring and control procedures are implemented.

The committee noted that procedures for gathering and analyzing data should be established to make it possible for the district to maintain a multi-year planning capacity.

Although the school board had appointed the citizens' committee, several board members were quite upset by the committee's interim report. It so angered board member Louise Stoll that she later characterized the committee as

> . . .having run wild and amuck. They all got very involved in the project, and this was neither healthy nor constructive participation.

She remarked that the committee had been told to study which schools to close, not whether to close schools at all.

Despite many obstacles, the committee turned in its final report on June 13, 1978. A simply worded eight-page introduction and summary of recommendations preceded three sections—"Facilities Planning: How It Should Work," "Facilities Planning: The Way It Is In Berkeley," "Use of BUSD Facilities, 1978-1982"—and extensive appendices. That report admonished the board to proceed with care so that affected neighborhoods would have time to orient themselves.

Reaction to the report was delayed by passage of Proposition 13, but this referendum has reduced the financial resources of Berkeley's schools still further and could force closing of even more schools than originally intended.

SAN FRANCISCO

Debates about San Francisco's declining population regularly appear in newspaper and television accounts; most conclude that San Francisco's quality of life is generally declining. The city government often blames the schools for population loss, but the school district counters with charges of high taxes, increasing cost of housing and declining city services.

As in Berkeley, frequent dissension among various school-related constituencies as well as between the school board and school administration encourages pervasive distrust of public school management. Distrust also stems from the inadequate or odd use of data, from the so-called numbers game in which the same set of figures supports conflicting proposals. Inaccuracies, when challenged, are often attributed to computer error.

Public school enrollment began to decline in San Francisco before 1970, when enrollment in most other districts was still high. By 1978, one quarter of the city's school-aged children were enrolled in private schools and 22 percent of the city's public school students were White while 78 percent came from various minorities. On the other hand, the seven-member school board included four Whites and three minority representatives—a Black, an Asian and an Hispanic. The system had experienced high turnover in its superintendents over the last few years and, by 1978, had also undergone and survived a lawsuit in which a high school graduate charged the district with failing to teach him to read well enough to remain in the army. (He claimed to have been humiliated by a discharge for functional illiteracy.)

Desegregation

Desegregation of San Francisco's schools has been largely externally imposed and subject to frequent lawsuits. In response to a suit filed by the NAACP, later joined by the American Civil Liberties Union, U.S. District Judge Stanley Wiegel ordered the district to integrate its schools seven years ago. In June 1978, however, the original suit was vacated and a newer and larger one filed to block the city's Project Redesign.

(Project Redesign, present Superintendent Robert Alioto's plan to meet the demands of declining enrollment and the requirements of desegregation by consolidating schools, had several objectives:

- Improving the quality of instruction
- Establishing academic standards

- Providing for school integration
- Reducing busing and operating costs

Cost reduction was no small part of Alioto's plan because the state demands budget complaince at the beginning of each fiscal year.)

Three almost all-Black schools in Hunter's Point did not really figure in Project Redesign's desegregation plan. The district tried to desegregate one elementary school by busing in students from Treasure Island Naval Base but parents and then U.S. Navy officers from the Pentagon blocked this move after some ugly exchanges between Hunter's Point and Treasure Island residents.

Public sentiment about desegregation is decidedly mixed. In Hunter's Point, for example, some residents advocate community control of schools. And, several years ago, the Chinese community objected strenuously to busing children out of Chinatown, an area with a serious housing shortage and rising housing costs due to a recent influx of immigrants and speculators. Chinatown's increasing emphasis on cultural identification has led many in the community to want to retain their children in community schools. Henry Der, of Chinese for Affirmative Action, did not fully sympathize with anti-busing sentiment in the Chinese community; he felt that parents "will support busing and desegregation if they are sold on good programs," but noted that Alioto "hasn't sold his plan to parents on the basis of its educational merits."

School Closings

The January 1978 version of Project Redesign marked 23 schools for closing—some as early as June—and scheduled public meetings for February, with board approval in early March. The meetings were volatile and

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lasted until the early morning hours; they became endurance tests for parents, students and district staff. Neighborhood groups organized quickly and prepared statistical research to support their claims; parents from one school found themselves pitted against parents from another as each group tried to convince administrators to keep its school open and close others. One parent remarked:

> To us. . .the Redesign battle hardly represents a 'small war'; we were fighting for the life of a school of proven excellence. Dr. Alioto and the school district did not simply change their minds. . .they were convinced by our reasonable approach and presentation of an excellent alternative proposal [which involved closing someone else's school] as well as support from all segments of our community.

Noting that school board decisions on issues like school closings are politically based, Myra Kopf, past PTA president and school board candidate, remarked that members often "yield to those who yell the loudest at any given time." She sees inadequate and inaccessible information, community pressures, and internal pressures as real constraints on individual board members' ability to make independent, informed judgments. Kopf also finds it especially difficult for San Francisco's school board to monitor the administration's implementation of board policies.

Danny McGettigan, a preschool teacher at John Swett Elementary School, was one of those who fought Redesign and won. A native San Franciscan attuned to the city's ethnic, labor, and community politics, McGettigan successfully advocated retention of the unusual school where he taught. John Swett, located in San Francisco's Western Addition redevelopment area, had received statewide acclaim for its federally funded multicultural program which served 18 different racial and ethnic minorities in a school with an 85 percent minority population. McGettigan began with the support of a few parents and then sought out others. Many of these were "afraid to go out at night" to the public meetings, according to McGettigan. The group he mustered convinced the school board not to close John Swett, and the board's unanimous change-of-heart testifies to McGettigan's knowledge of city politics, his personal alliances and his ability to play the numbers game—to get information and use it well in support of his cause.

Councils and Committees

San Francisco's Project Redesign also proposed school site councils composed of principals, teachers, other school personnel, parents and, in secondary schools, students so that "those most directly affected by educational decisions. . .take an active role in making those decisions." At the same time, however, a memorandum sent to all school principals stated, "Until the Redesign has been acted upon by the Board of Education, Principals are asked not to have faculty or parent meetings in any of the proposed Redesign sites." If activated, the school councils could provide a mechanism for genuine progress evaluations and for rational decisions about closings.

California's School Improvement Program, created by Assembly Bill 65 (AB 65), also establishes councils at each school site. AB 65 requires that all school districts,

> . . .whether they wish to participate or not, provide information on the school improvement program to their principals for dissemination to the school staff and community, and provide opportunities at each school site. . .to form a school site council.

The bill also calls for peer selection of council members and parity between school employees and non-school employee members—parents, other community members and students in junior and senior high schools. AB 65 continues:

> Participating councils are to develop a three-year school improvement plan. Once the plan is approved by the local governing board (school board) and funded by the State, the council has ongoing responsibility to review program implementation with the principal and school staff and to make modifications in the plan as necessary.

The implications for direct citizen participation in decision-making are obvious. And, as some money for implementation of councils goes along with their establishment, AB 65 has been attractive to districts feeling the fiscal squeeze.

Until now, citizens have participated in decision-making primarily through such groups as the board-appointed Educational Redesign Advisory Committee. Their minutes show distinct similarities to those of Berkeley's Citizens' Master Plan Facilities Committee. The May 15, 1978 minutes state: "A motion was made . . .to go to the. . .Board Meeting and express the committee's extreme displeasure that staff members did not attend our meetings." On June 19, the committee expressed a strong desire to discuss the administrative recommendation to cancel summer school; some members said the district did not know enough at that point to make such a recommendation and it should wait until more facts were obtained. On that date, the committee also began to request such information as:

- Number of administrators employed by SFUSD (in schools, field offices, and at 135 Van Ness, the district's administrative offices)
- Number of teachers
- Number of students
- List of administrators: their salaries and budget expenses (secretaries, cars, mileage, postage, etc.)

The board had approved a recommendation to appoint new administrators without assessing the possible impact of Proposition 13 so the committee's last question about how much money was being spent on administration was especially pertinent. This committee, like Berkeley's, may soon find itself considered "too involved" and be chastised for asking pertinent questions.

IMPACT OF PROPOSITION 13

Proposition 13—the Jarvis-Gann initiative—passed on June 6, 1978 with the support of an overwhelming majority of California's voters. This proposition severely limits the amount of revenue collected through local property taxes; it strikes at the core of school financing and, as we have seen, it is finances that most affect decisions on school closings.

Berkeley, San Francisco and Palo Alto voters rejected Proposition 13—by nearly three to one in Berkeley—yet the outcome is the same for them as for communities which voted "Yes." As of July 1, 1978, revenues from local and state taxes were critically reduced. While school districts tried frantically to balance their budgets in this new context, the governor and state legislature were figuring out how to apportion a several billion dollar state surplus to school districts, city and county governments, and public agencies so that most services could continue another year. The state's 1978-1979 surplus gave school districts like Palo Alto, Berkeley and San Francisco—districts with revenues that allow them to spend more than $2,000 per year per pupil—85 percent of their pre-Proposition 13 tax revenues. The real impact of Jarvis-Gann was not to be felt until 1979-1980.

The first programs the three districts cut were child care, adult education and summer school, programs which affect large numbers of people in each district. The groups affected have suffered from not being buccaneers—they are not getting "as much of everything as they can use," and they are hardly even getting "very careful consideration." As each city cut back or eliminated summer parks and recreation programs, working and student parents were left without resources for their children. Especially hard hit were parents in the lower economic strata. Citizens, churches and private groups struggled to set up summer programs that would help at least some of these parents.

It is ironic that, under Proposition 13, districts can be penalized for sound budget management. If a district builds up reserves greater than five percent of its operating budget, it incurs penalties. For example, Palo Alto, with a $3.5 million surplus, would seem to be in a position of ease compared to Berkeley, which teeters yearly on the brink of bankruptcy. Spurred on by Proposition 13, however, Palo Alto spent its surplus as rapidly as possible before fiscal year end. Like Berkeley and San Francisco, it cancelled summer school and then spent its surplus on such things as sports equipment, lumber and 300 tons of sand.

School administrations and teacher unions felt threatened by Proposition 13-inspired layoffs and school closings; San Francisco teacher union president James Ballard coined a catchy slogan when he claimed that the administration was "cutting the heart out of the district and not the fat." The June 29 *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

> Appearing bewildered and glum, San Francisco's Board of Education adopted a tentative budget of $142.2 million last night that would close 11 public schools, freeze all salaries in the school district and eliminate 938 jobs.

Two of 11 board-designated school closings overlapped with schools on the Project Redesign list of 24—only eight of which had actually closed—and the board made no provisions for citizen participation in the decision to close additional schools.

Berkeley's history of confrontation between teacher union representatives and the school board and administration did not change with Proposition 13. The board, after recording its opposition to the proposition in May, decided not to plan for a possible $19 million cut in its $37 million budget but rather to await the outcome of the June vote. School board member James Guthrie even suggested that the district open in the fall, run normally until its money ran out in approximately mid-December, and then close its schools until the legislature "came to its senses." (Guthrie seems to have overlooked the fact that the electorate, not the legislature, passed Proposition 13.)

Berkeley's board also toyed with suggestions to cut all teacher salaries by 20 percent, lay off 140 tenured teachers in addition to those already scheduled for 1978-1979 layoffs, close varying numbers of schools, and eliminate all but a fraction of the district's adult education and child care sevices. Alarmed teacher representatives prepared for battle; they accused the board of irresponsibility and deliberate attempts to destroy teachers' gains from collective gargaining by declaring a fiscal crisis. The board's suggestions for dealing with Proposition 13 sounded ominously familiar to the teachers because, during Berkeley's 1976 fiscal emergency, the board's first proposal had been similar:

cut teacher salaries by 20 percent and lay off teachers. (The board's second step directly affected teachers recently hired under desegregation and the two steps together had precipitated Berkeley's divisive teacher's strike.)

The board proceeded in spite of the teacher representatives' charges; it did nothing to alleviate the ill will generally prevalent during budget considerations. By June 14, the district had proposed wage cuts of 20 percent for teachers, discontinuation of teachers' fringe benefits, and an undetermined rate of cuts in administrative staff. When the board voted on its tentative budget in July, however, it reduced cuts in teacher and administrator wages to ten percent and reduced rather than discontinued fringe benefits. Many of its other proposals evaporated.

Not surprisingly, parents did not know how to respond to Jarvis-Gann; the general citizenry was as shocked by the expected loss of jobs and services in city government as by the loss in the schools. When Jarvis-Gann became a reality, school people joined with others to march on Sacramento demanding that Berkeley's budget not be cut. But Berkeley, like Palo Alto and San Francisco, still received only 15 percent of the surplus. Berkeley's teacher union pioneered in filing suit to challenge the consitutionality of Proposition 13, but none of these challenges has succeeded so far.

Palo Alto's school officials did not panic, because they had anticipated Proposition 13's passage. They devised a balanced, realistic budget requiring no teacher layoffs or school closings beyond those already planned. Palo Alto's accumulated surplus—nearly ten percent of its operating budget— no doubt contributed to its comparatively calm reaction. As noted earlier, however, the surplus itself created a few problems for Palo Alto.

THE FUTURE

What will happen in 1979-1980? Most of the state's surplus will have been exhausted, and Proposition 13 has forbidden a district or city to add new taxes without the support of two-thirds of its voters.

In addition to the new fiscal problems created by Proposition 13 and the Serrano-Priest decisions, growing legislative support for a statewide voucher system threatens the already beleaguered school districts. The voucher system, if implemented, would provide a specific amount of money for the annual education of each student and would allow parents to choose which school, public or private, would receive students and money. Vouchers could undermine attempts to integrate the schools and make nearly impossible the task of long-range planning because the population at each school would change yearly.

These three communities differ strikingly along four dimensions—political context, definition of problems, operating style and support of schools. The differences on these four dimensions have shaped each community's reaction to the challenge of offering quality education in spite of radical budget cuts.

UPDATE

Proposition 13's initial impact on school budgets was softened by the legislature's distribution of nearly one half of the state's five billion dollar surplus to cities, towns and school districts. School districts have still had to make cuts, however, and have tended to eliminate athletic and extra-curricular activities, reduce maintenance expenditures, cut some non-teaching employees, and drop more special programs such as remediation and summer school.

San Francisco has felt the crunch most severely. Even with the prospect of a generous second-year bailout, the district stands to lose about $12 million so its Board of Education has notified 2200 of the city's 4000 teachers that they may be let go during 1979-1980. While the district has held appeal hearings for each of the 2200 employees requesting them, morale in the city's schools has plummeted; some 800 teachers demonstrated at the school board's June 1979 meeting.

June's board meeting also heard Project Redesign's 1978-1979 implementation report; this school board-appointed committee found that:

- The curriculum is not relevant to student needs.
- Some aspects of Redesign were "logistical disasters."
- The district's elimination of school attendance officers has caused a four million dollar a year loss.
- The high schools are overcrowded but 21 elementary schools have less than 300 students.
- Districts do not know what their 1979-1980 operating budget will be so they are not yet planning for the opening of school.
- Buildings closed by the district suffer from lack of care and vandalism.
- Racial segregation at Hunter's Point-Bay View, an 85 percent Black school, is "totally unacceptable."

This committee recommended against additional school closings and urged that buildings already closed be put to revenue-producing use. It also noted that administrative staff did not cooperate in providing information to the committee (*San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1979, Solveig Torvik).

When Palo Alto voted to close Cubberley, the newest of three city high schools, community members called for a referendum on the closing but their position was not upheld in court. Plans for transferring students and staff from Ventura to other district schools have been made, and Ventura will close in the summer of 1980.

The character of Berkeley's school board has altered over the past year. Two of its new members campaigned on a platform of more community involvement in the school district's decisions and less autonomy for central office personnel. New board members have also committed themselves to reinstituting community participation in selection of building administrators. Finally, in a decision which has proved highly controversial, the board has voted to replace Superintendent Laval Wilson at the end of the 1979-1980 school year. Racial tension has increased amid discussion of a possible recall of members who voted to oust Wilson.

The school district's business manager has just resigned, claiming that the board and central administration frustrated his attempts to make clear the financial constraints on policy decisions.

LEXINGTON: DECLINING ENROLLMENT IN AN EDUCATIONAL BOOM TOWN

Dianne Dumanoski

As staff writer for the Boston Phoenix, *Dumanoski's articles have covered a broad range of topics, including the educational scene. Previously, she worked at WGBH-TV as a news and public affairs writer and later, as an on-air reporter for "The Reporters."*

Patriot's Day is still a major celebration in the old Massachusetts town of Lexington. In the chilly early morning hours on April 19th, townspeople dressed in knee pants and tricorn hats gather on the town green to reenact the Battle of Lexington, one of the 1775 skirmishes between British troops and Minutemen which sparked the American Revolution. Later in the day, spectators crowd along Massachusetts Avenue for the annual Patriot's Day parade, which features not only the expected collection of high school bands and VFW contingents, but colonial fife and drum units squeaking "Yankee Doodle" and half a dozen Minutemen militias from the surrounding towns—suburbanites who for the day man muzzle-loaders rather than pruning shears.

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In the 1977 parade, there was an unexpected marching unit: a group of Lexington schoolchildren carrying a coffin-like box draped in black. A sign attached to the box announced to the spectators, "Hancock is about to be buried." The message must have confused spectators from out of town because it did not refer to the Revolutionary War patriot, John Hancock, but to an elementary school bearing his name. After a long and emotional fight by parents and children to save the oldest school in Lexington, the school committee had voted to close Hancock in September, the first in a series of older Lexington schools to be phased out due to declining enrollment.

Lexington still projects the image of a small New England town, especially on occasions like Patriot's Day when Massachusetts Avenue's white colonial houses with black shutters display American flags. Since World War II, however, the town has grown into an affluent suburb of 34,000. The town planner reports that the median income is $24,000 ($9,000 above the national average) and that Lexington boasts the highest number of professionals per capita of any community in the state. Harvard and MIT professors and other highly educated professionals have favored Lexington because of it proximity to Cambridge and the electronics and computer industries along Route 128.

Like Newton and Brookline, Lexington is one of the exclusive Boston suburbs parents seek out specifically because of its school system's reputation. Children there test well above the national average on standardized tests and many graduates of the town's schools go off to the most prestigious colleges and universities. Lexington has always had a vocal, articulate and demanding constituency for its schools.

Lexington politics are dominated by the struggle between these more recent arrivals and long-time town residents, a dynamic described by some residents as liberal versus conservative, by others as town versus gown. Though long-time residents are scattered across town, many of them live in East Lexington, an old neighborhood of modest homes. Out of necessity, these residents worry about town spending and the size of their tax bill.

Typically, the liberals accuse the conservatives of worrying only about money and not education, while the conservatives respond that liberal parents want the best of everything for the schools regardless of cost. Although the school closing issue did not split the town neatly into liberal and conservative camps, the ongoing antagonism between these two groups, their conflicting attitudes and expectations shaped the political battle.

The phenomenon of declining enrollment surfaced in Lexington in 1974, before it was recognized as a nationwide trend. Many townspeople found the decline hard to accept because during the 1950's and 1960's, Lexington's population had grown by 20,000 and it had been an educational boom town. The town had constructed nine new schools, rushing to keep ahead of the demand. "We used to build just so a kid could have a seat," recalled Pat Swanson, former business manager of a private school, a school committee member and the leading proponent of school closings. The realization that Lexington's school population was dropping came as a "big shock," she said.

Superintendent Rudolph Fobert had recommended that the school system study its facilities to see if they offered equal opportunity to all students. The school committee approved his proposal for an architectural firm to conduct a facilities survey and recommend a long-range strategy for school buildings. School committee member Swanson said, however, "There was never a mention of declining enrollment, but I think the superintendent must have known something was coming."

The population projections accompanying the architect's report showed that Lexington's school population was dropping rapidly and would continue to do so. Lexington now expects to have about 5300 students by 1981, 4000 fewer than at the 1969 peak. Lexington Town Planning Director Kenneth Briggs attributed this not only to a declining birthrate, but to the changing nature of the town. Once an attractive suburb for young parents with children, Lexington is now becoming an older community. With little open space left for development, land and housing prices have soared. New homes now sell for over $70,000, beyond the reach of most young families. Those moving into town now generally are older people with higher incomes. "In the future," Briggs said, "Lexington will be a suburb of the older and the affluent."

The architect's report stirred up both camps in town by recommending "reassignment," a euphemism for closing, of five schools and an extensive and expensive renovation program for some others. Most liberals lined up against closings, but conservatives whose children would be affected also joined the opposition. Schools targeted for closing were chosen according to age and condition; they included both East Lexington's neighborhood school and schools serving the children of affluent professionals. These opponents of closings attacked the architect's study for its failure to consider educational matters. Conservatives were also outraged at the prospect of further major expenditures for school renovations.

Frank Michelman, a Harvard Law School professor who won election to the school committee during the lengthy school closing controversy that followed, reflected the prevailing liberal opinion that the architect's

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report was an unfortunate first step into the issue of closings. He noted:

> It got the discussion off on the wrong foot with too sharp a focus on architects and buildings. Often the answers you get depend on the questions you ask.

Liberals maintained throughout the controversy that the school department was asking the wrong questions; they held that a school's success in teaching children was more important than the age and condition of its buildings.

After this initial skirmish, the Lexington school committee decided to appoint three citizens' committees to study different aspects of school closings: financial savings; reassignment of students; and, curriculum and school performance. Swanson had thought these citizens' committees would perform two services:

> It was an attempt to gather more information ourselves, since we do have a great deal of expertise here in Lexington. And we felt if more people in the community became involved and understood the problem, we'd have more support.

The citizens' committees drew from the wealth of professional talent in Lexington and proved formidable indeed. Members of the Educational Program Study Committee (EPSC) included, for example, an educational consultant, a psychiatrist and the head of the MIT math department. One observer remarked, "If the town had had to pay, it couldn't have afforded this kind of expertise." The dedication of these volunteer groups matched their skills. Kenneth Hoffman, MIT math professor and member of the EPSC before his election to the school committee, estimated that the group spent at least 5000 hours interviewing parents, teachers and children, conducting surveys, and visiting each of the elementary schools studied.

Reports by the three citizens' committees stirred up still more controversy. The reassignment committee objected to the sequence of closings proposed by the architects and offered another in its place. This the school committee quickly adopted.

The financial committee challenged the school administration's projections on savings, arguing that the financial consequences of closing schools could not be fully understood until the future use of the buildings was known. This group recommended, therefore, that future use be a factor in deciding which buildings to close. The financial committee also challenged the administration's contention that smaller, older buildings were more expensive to operate than newer buildings.

The Educational Program Study Committee examined the strengths and weaknesses of each elementary school and concluded that two of the four elementary schools slated for closing should remain open because they were exceptionally successful. Their report directly challenged the operating assumption that the quality of education would improve if older schools were closed and their students transferred to newer facilities:

> On the contrary, we have found just the opposite. The older schools are also the smaller, neighborhood schools: the students would lose something which is educationally important.

The fact that buildings were old, the committee concluded, was of very small educational significance. Indeed, "the most outstanding school in Lexington by almost every measure of educational effectiveness" was the oldest, Hancock, which opened in 1891. The EPSC noted that, "The only aspect of physical facilities we have found which does bear on quality of educational opportunity, to a certain extent, is school size." Though their study showed that school size did not affect whether students learned the basic skills, the EPSC believed that schools with less than 250 students fostered a sense of community and better human relationships. It therefore recommended that every effort be made to keep small schools open.

Nancy Bender, an educational consultant, Lexington parent and member of the EPSC, observed:

> The parents at Hancock were absolutely convinced. I didn't believe it was as good as they were saying it was, so they sent me to look at it. My children were in 12 school systems before Lexington, so I had a lot of basis for comparison. There *was* something special about Hancock. It was small and manageable and had a lovely, warm, supportive atmosphere.

Others in town questioned the validity of the committee's conclusions, however; they said EPSC was composed of persons with "vested interests" because some members were parents from the endangered schools. Pat Swanson, for one, remained unconvinced that a small school like Hancock had any outstanding advantages as a place for children to study. "If someone had said to me that all the kids were achieving better in math or that the school had no learning problems, . . . but they had nothing to support their conclusion." In the end, said Nancy Bender, the differences were essentially philosophical.

The EPSC report could not have appeared at a worse time politically, especially in view of its conclusions about school closings. During the previous month, February 1976, the school committee had voted to close Hancock in September 1977. The 1976 school committee campaign, in which Pat Swanson was running for reelection and liberal candidates were attacking the committee's approach to closings, was also at its height. The conservative-controlled school committee decided to postpone release of the EPSC report until after the election on the grounds that school officials needed time to digest its contents. This postponement outraged Lexington liberals and became a campaign issue. When the votes were counted, however, Swanson had been reelected and liberals were still a minority on the committee.

After the election, school closings receded into the background while John Lawson, the new superintendent of schools, took stock of the system. (His predecessor, Rudolph Fobert, initiator of the controversial architects' study, had left to take a new position.)

In August 1976, Lawson was asked to evaluate the vote closing Hancock and recommend ways to handle the declining enrollment problem. Lawson returned to the committee in late January 1977 with a report supporting the previous administration's proposal: close Hancock, three other older elementary schools and one junior high. He estimated a total savings of $835,000 if these five schools were closed by 1980. In responding to the debate about small as opposed to large schools, Lawson cited a Montgomery County, Maryland study which found no educational differences between small and large facilities. Lawson also noted that larger schools did offer students better facilities like libraries, gymnasiums, cafeterias and specially designed rooms for art and music.

Lawson's report fanned the school closing controversy to a new intensity. Four hundred parents attended a February 5 open meeting at Clarke Junior High School; they challenged enrollment projections, disputed the projected savings, and argued the virtues of each threatened school. One father came armed with his own summary of the educational literature on small versus large schools. A number of parents expressed concern about the future use of the Hancock school building, but the school committee's conservative majority maintained that future use was, by law, a question for the town, not for the school committee. Another group questioned the wisdom of closing older schools in the center of town, leaving only the newer schools in the outlying areas. Such a move, they argued, would weaken the older neighborhoods and change the character of the town.

Most at the February 5 meeting opposed the closings, but former school committee member, Richard Eaton, came forward to argue for closings. "It's impossible for a retired person on a fixed income to live in a single family house anymore," he noted. (Eaton was being forced to sell his house because of rising taxes.) It appears that Eaton did represent a substantial body of town opinion, even though few people from that group attended the public meetings. Nancy Bender also acknowledged that group:

> The school committee does have a clientele that worries about costs. Some people have to move out of Lexington because of taxes. Folks from MIT and Harvard can't see their point of view.

As the hostility and frustration in the audience mounted, someone in the audience shouted that Swanson was steamrolling. Kenneth Hoffman, EPSC chairperson and later a school committee member, said, "It's very important that public officials project the image that they're really listening to different points of view. They didn't project that image." Mike Alexander, a parent with two children who attended the now closed Parker School, observed:

> In a town like Lexington, what you should do is let people say what they want to say and follow up on the ideas. It may be a very inefficient way to do things, but in the end people won't feel as if they were run over by a Mack truck.

Throughout the controversy, parents complained that the school committee had refused to look at other alternatives like closing a newer school which might be easier to lease or convert to a new use.

Later in February 1977, as the school committee reconsidered its previous vote to close Hancock, a member of the conservative majority, perhaps hoping that it would be easier to close an unpopular school, proposed that the school administration study the possibility of closing Bridge, a newer elementary school disliked by many parents. Evidently the school was not unpopular with everyone because Bridge's parents erupted in a torrent of protest. Superintendent Lawson was also of the opinion that closing Bridge would be infeasible and unwise; the school had been built with state assistance and the town might have to return funds before it could put the building to non-school use. Practical problems would arise as well; Bridge students would overcrowd the receiving schools and require long bus rides across town.

School committee member Michelman wondered whether it was difficult for school administrators to take seriously the idea of closing a new building, "One got the feeling that the administration felt it was absurd to throw away a new building and save a structure old and inadequate by their standards." Jim Beck, a Hancock parent who served on the EPSC, characterized that attitude this way:

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> The school administrators were surprised and amazed that everyone had doubts about new buildings . . . They wanted to put every kid in a plastic seat.

Many parents voiced objections to the new buildings on aesthetic grounds alone, calling them "sterile," "ugly," and examples of "modern bathroom architecture."

Whatever the specific arguments, Pat Swanson believed that liberals were reluctant to see any schools close. "I think they felt a vote to close the schools was an anti-education vote . . . I felt it was sensible policy. They perceived it as a withdrawal of support for the schools," she remarked. Swanson also thought some parent groups were insensitive to the feelings of fiscal conservatives, "They have the attitude that 'we're going to have an elaborate school system and, if you don't like it, leave.'" Swanson also said the increasing age of Lexington's population and its reluctance to support the schools worried her:

> I see more and more senior citizens who don't want to spend money on education. There is a certain group attacking the school budget. Everybody is starting to pull and tug.

In spite of Frank Michelman's assertion that the school committee needed another year to study the alternatives, the school committee again voted to close Hancock the following September. The three conservatives voted in favor, the two liberals against.

The school committee election in March 1977 followed another heated campaign. The entire school committee was not up for election then because, in Lexington, two members stand for each election. This contest saw three candidates for the two open seats: Robert Rothberg, a liberal incumbent; Kenneth Hoffman, a member of the EPSC; and Jean Gaudet, an advocate of closing nonessential schools. Rothberg lost his bid for reelection and was replaced by fellow liberal Hoffman. Gaudet assumed the seat left vacant by a retiring conservative. The balance of power remained unchanged and the final hope of overturning the vote to close Hancock vanished.

The battle over, Lexington proceeded to close schools, starting in September 1977 with Hancock and moving on in 1978 to Parker, another elementary school praised by the EPSC report. "If the liberals had won, I'm convinced the town would have closed schools anyway, but they would have closed different schools on different criteria," said Gerald Abegg, a professional educator, Hancock parent and unsuccessful school committee candidate in 1976.

Looking back on the struggle to save his children's school, Hancock parent Jim Beck said, "The political process was outrageous, but once the decision was made to close, the school department did a good job with the transition." Hancock parents were pleased when children were taken to visit their new school to meet the teachers and children there. When the students went off to their new schools in September, things reportedly went smoothly at Fiske but less so at Hastings because of some overcrowding.

A year later, Hancock students who had written "Hancock, we love you" poems and made "Save Hancock" posters seemed to have made friends and settled into their new schools. They reported missing their old school, but found many good things in the new one. "I thought it was going to be terrible, but it wasn't the end of the world," reflected one little girl. Another added, "At Hancock everybody knew everybody, but there weren't many new people. Now I've got lots of new friends." A girl with freckles and long braids interrupted, however, to register a complaint: "I don't like the busing. Having to take the bus is boring. You have to listen to the bus driver yelling at the kids. Walking to school is more fun. We could play games in the snow."

Looking back, Hancock parent Paul Marshall doubted the wisdom of fighting so hard to save a school, "A lot of money was spent to keep the school open, instead of on positive things." After noting that the sense of community which made Hancock special could be created in another school, Marshall observed, "I'd advise other parents, 'Don't fight for the building, fight for the school system.'"

Surprisingly, the September 1978 closing of Parker School provoked more bitterness than the demise of Hancock. A large proportion of Parker students, unlike those from Hancock, came from a single, identifiable neighborhood—The Manor. Parker parents argued that closing the school would eviscerate a community whose activities focused strongly on its school. After they failed to save their community's school, Parker parents fought to get all Parker students transferred to a single school. The school administration, acting on the instructions of the school committee and hoping to calm things down, then bent its transfer policy considerably to permit most Parker students to transfer to Estabrook School.

Looking back on the whole closings controversy, Nancy Bender said:

> I know a lot of people wouldn't agree with me, but by and large I think Lexington did a very good job on school closings . . . especially given the political factions, the tough vocal parent group, and the fact the town has a wide economic spread. There's no way a school administration can win on an issue like this. It's painful and tough.

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Two years after it began closing schools, Lexington's school administration has reported capital, maintenance and staff savings of $129,000 from closing Hancock, $156,000 from shutting down Parker and approximately $150,000 from the 1979 closing of Monroe.

The school committee returned the closed buildings to the Lexington Board of Selectmen, which represented the town as owner of school buildings, and set up a committee to evaluate future use. The selectmen invited developers to offer proposals for redevelopment of the Hancock school building and examined each proposal in light of its neighborhood impact and economic benefit to the community. The developer whose proposal won paid $100,000 for Hancock's handsome old brick structure; he converted it into 18 one- and two-bedroom condominiums which opened in December 1978. This redevelopment will add little to the town's school population but will yield about $30,000 a year in tax revenue.

An interesting footnote to the Lexington experience has been the fate of the controversial Education Program Study Committee report. Although the school committee disregarded its recommendations to keep Parker and Hancock open, the new superintendent has adopted many of the curriculum recommendations—like a Curriculum Resource Center for teachers—which formed the bulk of the report. "As input into the school closing debate," Ken Hoffman reflected, "the Committee's report was too hot to handle. But now it's being used fairly well." Pat Swanson concurred, "Once we started looking at finances and enrollment, we got caught up in a reevaluation of other things. School closings can be a real chance to stop and change direction."

In fact, as Superintendent Lawson noted, the approximately $500,000 saved by closing schools has been put to good use. Some has been used to meet annual ten percent inflation increases. The rest has gone to salary increases and to program maintenance and innovation. Among those innovations: the Curriculum Resource Center and elementary school specialists in drama, language arts and social studies. Test scores, particularly in the area of writing skills, have increased. Lawson concluded, "Even though resources are tight and will be more so with the legislated tax cap* we have had the flexibility to grow and do new things."

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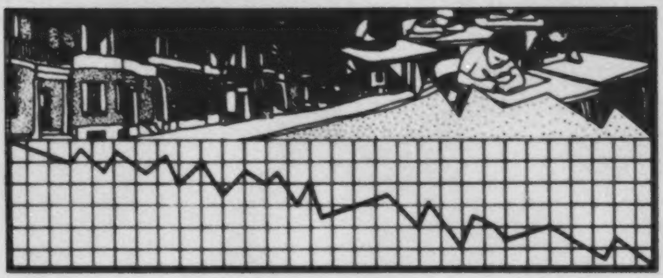
*The "tax cap" is a Massachusetts limitation on spending more than four percent above last year's budget.



BOSTON POLITICS AND PARENT PARTICIPATION

Dianne Dumanoski

These days Boston's political and educational leaders talk optimistically about marketing the school system and capturing new students, especially White and middle class students. They believe the future of the city's schools is hanging in the balance; they see the next three to five years as their last chance to rebuild public confidence in a system battered by decades of stagnation and patronage, 15 years of political strife over desegregation and, finally, a federal court order ending the dual school system fostered by Boston's school committee. Boston schools, the court discovered, were segregated not by housing patterns but by school department policies which funneled Black children off to inferior and ill-equipped schools—the schools that fiery young teacher, Jonathan Kozol, had indicted a decade earlier in *Death At An Early Age*.

Many of Boston's political leaders had fought against desegregation every step of the way. Former school committee chairperson Louise Day Hicks had built a political career on her opposition to busing. The North's

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answer to Lester Maddox, Mrs. Hicks emerged as a national symbol of resistance to busing: she repeatedly promised Boston's White parents that no child would ever have to endure "forced busing." Many believed her. When the buses finally rolled—eventually carrying 25,000 students to desegregate the schools—White working class neighborhoods resisted with school boycotts and violence. Severe disruptions broke out in four schools. The most bitter resistance emerged at South Boston High—an aged yellow brick school perched among three deckers in Mrs. Hicks's neighborhood. Outside, angry mobs stoned buses carrying Black students; inside, uniformed police patrolled the hallways to maintain order. South Boston High became the Little Rock of the seventies.

The yellow brick high school on the hill is quiet now. The worst lies behind it. Now in its fifth year of the federal court order, Boston has a new superintendent in Robert Wood, its first chief administrator to come from outside the school system and its political patronage structure. Moves have begun to reorganize and modernize the antiquated school department; federal Judge W. Arthur Garrity has ordered a controversial facilities planning effort to renovate, repair, construct, close and modify the program use of many schools across the city. Because of school officials' resistance to carrying out his desegregation order, Garrity has become deeply involved in internal school department business, in effect running the schools from his courtroom. Now he wishes to disengage. Before he can do this, however, Garrity believes a long range plan for repair and replacement of school buildings must be in place.

Since the court order in 1974, the judge has ordered 37 of the city's schools closed for reasons relating both to desegregation and to the dilapidated condition of schools, many of which were built in the nineteenth century. In 1977, for example, he closed the Storrow Elementary School in Boston's Brighton neighborhood, citing the long bus ride for Black students, the dilapidated condition of the building and the lack of enough White students despite the school's location in a White neighborhood. "Black students bused across town to desegregate a formerly White neighborhood school find themselves attending a Black segregated facility," Garrity observed. He has repeatedly expressed the fear that too many empty seats in the system's schools will jeopardize gains already made by providing an opportunity for the school committee to resegregate schools.

Educational experts who advise Garrity have estimated 20,000 empty seats in Boston's schools. With this kind of information, it is difficult to dispute that some schools should close. Political pressure for closings comes from outside the court as well. The Boston Municipal Research Bureau, whose work is mainly funded by contributions from the business community, issued a detailed study on declining enrollment which recommended immediate closing of 19 elementary schools. The Municipal Research Bureau contends these closings are compatible with the desegregation order and would save taxpayers over $1,000,000, a figure school department analysts say is too high. (In fact, school closings could cost more than they would save because they could require extensive busing of the reassigned students.)

Given the troubled history and uncertain future of Boston's schools, much more is at stake than financial savings. As Judge Garrity transfers power back to local hands, the questions of which schools will close and who will decide have far-reaching political implications. The answers will affect desegregation, the power of the court-instituted parent advisory structure, and strategies for strengthening confidence in the schools. Underlying all these issues is the unsettling prospect of a 60 percent minority school system in a city that is still 73 percent White.

The prospect of closings brings Boston new hazards and new opportunities. At the least, closing schools presents the threat of further disruption to parents and children who have been shifted and reassigned—many of them more than once—during the past four years. Some argue, however, that this new upset is not only unavoidable, but absolutely necessary.

Declining enrollment is a far more complex matter for an urban school system like Boston than for a relatively homogeneous, largely White, middle class community like Lexington. Since Boston's enrollment hit its peak of 128,735 in 1928, the student population has been dropping steadily. Between 1970 and 1978, for example, enrollment dropped from 97,000 to 72,000. What worries public officials more than declining numbers, however, are changes in the composition of the student population. The schools are losing students whose parents represent the middle class tax base of the city. Although that loss is partly due to a declining birth rate and the continuing migration of the middle class to surrounding suburbs, large numbers of White families have not left the city at all; they have simply abandoned the school system.

Three generations ago, the conflict between Irish immigrants and Yankee educators spurred Catholic Boston to develop an extensive network of parochial schools in and around the city—a shadow school system that has offered the dissatisfied an escape route and weakened the public schools. Parochial schools are so much a part of the fabric of Boston life that no one thought it strange when voters elected school committee members who preferred to educate their children outside the public system. Louise Day Hicks always talked about saving our children, but hers were in the hands of the good nuns. An estimated one-fourth of the city's school-age population or at least 22,000 children, most of them White, attend parochial schools. (Many others have been funneled to private schools modeled on the rigorous college preparatory environment of English boarding schools.) The Savin Hill neighborhood in Dorchester is typical of many of the city's White, middle class areas. "Look at this neighborhood," said one Savin Hill mother, gesturing to the rambling old Victorian houses that crowd together on a peninsula jutting into the harbor. "Not one kid in this neighborhood *except* mine goes to public schools."

Though Humberto Cardinal Medeiros pledged publicly that parochial schools would not serve as havens for those wishing to escape desegregation, in reality he exercised little control over the parish schools. Many accepted large numbers of transfers. In the years prior to desegregation, the city's White student population was dropping by 3,000 a year. From September 1974 to October 1975, during the beginnings of court-ordered desegregation, between 7,000 and 9,000 students, four-fifths of them White, withdrew from the public schools.* Of those withdrawing, more than half switched out of the public and into the archdiocese's nearby parochial schools.

For Black students, one alternative to Boston's public schools is a twelve year old program called METCO, Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity. Black parents, the most aggressive advocates of educational reform in the 1960's, formed METCO with some MIT professors, in the belief that the suburbs should

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*Enrollment data for the decade before 1975 are too unreliable to allow for greater precision. Prior to the court order, for example, the school department had counted dropouts and other "phantom seats" in enrollment figures.

come to the aid of inner-city children. With funds from the state legislature, METCO buses minority students to suburban school systems like Lexington, Newton, Wellesley and Brookline. METCO involves only 3,000 students from the Boston schools, but their leaving somewhat depletes the ranks of parents advocating quality education in the city's public schools. On the other hand, the Hispanic and Asian American segments of Boston's public school population have grown noticeably over the past decade.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Prior to the 1975 court order, Boston's Home and School Association, whose constitution explicitly forbids any attack on the school system, channeled parent involvement into booster clubs for individual schools. These local associations often ran bake sales to sponsor field trips or buy world maps for classrooms. Said one mother with a long history of involvement:

> Let's face it. What they say about Home and School is true. It was a company union. How many hours did I spend working on white elephant sales to buy this or that for the school? One time, we were raising money to buy a moveable cart to take library books from room to room—the school didn't even have a library. Now I look back and ask myself, 'Why the hell were we doing this?' These were the things the school department should have supplied!

When the city split over the desegregation issue, the Home and School Association lined up with the opponents and alienated major segments of the parent constituency.

The June 1975 court order for school desegregation created a new system for participation; it established community districts, magnet school programs and a three-tiered parent council structure. These councils were to monitor the desegregation process and allow for greater local control of the schools. Council members at all three levels—local, district and citywide—are elected. They are required to reflect the racial composition of the community they represent. Some councils have expanded their monitoring role to include investigating and assessing all areas of education—transportation, curriculum, staffing and school policies.

Henry Allen, former Citywide Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) cochairperson and now a district council member, commented:

> The parent advisory councils are partly responsible for successful desegregation of the schools. These councils make it possible for Hispanic, Asian, White and Black parents to talk together and help resolve racial tensions. It's remarkable, considering the long history of segregation and exclusion in Boston, that there was so little violence. Most people were against violence even if they were anti-busing. Before, there were very limited ways for parents to involve themselves in schools. Now there are possibilities for involvement in every aspect of the schools at all levels—from helping to write proposals for funding to creating new programs to pressuring the school department for improvements in transportation to choosing principals. There has been an evolution; people see that the only way they're going to have impact in the schools is through the councils, not through Home and School or marching in the streets. Parents want to get on with the education of their children and the way to do that is by getting on a council; they know that's where the action is.

Whether the new parent councils can develop into a legitimate and politically effective voice for Boston parents still remains to be seen. That the councils were ordered into existence by Judge Garrity is paradoxically their greatest strength and greatest weakness. While the councils have a certain amount of clout because they have the ear of the judge,* this relationship has stigmatized them in the eyes of many parents who dislike desegregation.

"Certain segments of the school population feel they are being represented by the councils," said Jane Morrison-Margulis, a White CPAC representative from Dorchester. "The more active Blacks, the White liberals, and a lot of the magnet school parents have a voice." (The magnet schools focus on particular program areas, such as the arts or vocational education, and have been patronized by many of the system's more progressive parents.) "But," she continued, "I don't think the moderate White parent who is against busing is represented. They get on a council at first, but they get frozen out."

It also seems that the advisory structure has not allayed the misgivings of conservative White parents. Mo Gillen, a community leader in the all-White, strongly anti-busing Charlestown neighborhood, echoed these doubts, "The councils were Garrity's instrument. That was part of the problem." But Gillen also believed the attitudes of those dominating CPAC have been the real stumbling block:

> They want blanket acceptance of the [desegregation] edict. They're not sympathetic to those who have resisted. It's a typical liberal mentality.

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*CPAC's relationship to the school department and school committee has changed somewhat since the fall of 1978, when Wood became superintendent and the school committee election changed its membership. CPAC now brings issues of concern before the superintendent and the school committee for resolution. When their responses are unfavorable or delayed due to lack of interest, however, CPAC still has recourse to the court for a decision.

On the other hand, Bernice Randell, member of a district council, observed:

> Anyone can run for the councils and be elected. Antibusing parents are a part of the parent advisory council structure on all levels. It's true that they have difficulties addressing the desegregation issue when it comes before councils. We're talking about the education of Black and White children and in doing so we have to discuss affirmative action programs and why the burden of transportation has fallen on the Black children. If members of the council structure don't feel comfortable in discussing such issues, they must deal with them on an individual basis. No parent is excluded from the structure which is trying to improve the education of all Boston children, whatever their color. We have a job to do —education. If we can prove by our success that the educational level can be improved, everyone will climb on the bandwagon.

UNIFIED FACILITIES PLAN

Though Judge Garrity closed dozens of schools by court order between 1974 and 1978, he is now trying to get state, city and school officials to assume responsibility for problems like declining enrollment. He instructed that the Massachusetts Department of Education, the City of Boston and the Boston School Department work together to develop a Unified Facilities Plan (UFP), a long-term strategy for school closings, renovation and construction over the next decade. The criteria Garrity laid out for the UFP were desegregation and equal educational opportunity. Significantly absent from this planning team was the five-member Boston school committee which the judge had repeatedly rebuked for obstructionism and foot-dragging on a variety of matters. Nor did Garrity include the Citywide Parent Advisory Council (CPAC), the parent structure he himself had created.

The Unified Facilities Plan submitted to the court in November 1977 was primarily a survey of Boston's school buildings; it identified approximately 40 buildings as likely candidates for closing over the next decade. By their own admission, the planners had not submitted anything more than a skeletal proposal for long-term school closings. They recommended annual review of school closings to permit a full discussion of broader concerns but also concluded that at least nine schools were so clearly inadequate that they should be closed without extensive review.

Even before the Unified Facilities Plan was made public, CPAC cried foul. In letters to the superintendent and the court, parents protested that they had been shut out of the planning process. Parents were further angered when they discovered that, while they had been unable to see the UFP report, the Municipal Research Bureau—the leading advocate of school closings—had seen a copy. This parents saw as insult added to injury. One city official observed that the first round of the Unified Facilities fight was "one of the worst handled fiascos. Clearly the worst way to do it was to have the planners develop a plan and take it out for reaction."

In strictly political terms, school closings provided parent councils with a strong issue—the planning process itself—and a good organizing opportunity. CPAC began negotiating with the school department for a series of public hearings in school districts across the city so parents and others could comment on the plan. These hearings offered CPAC the opportunity to inform all councils and notify parents of the UFP's planning process and recommendations. CPAC had found an issue with broad-based support both from those who saw their schools threatened and those who objected to the process. Not only parents but also teachers and school administrators had been excluded. "It was an important, volatile issue," said Pat Corcoran, a CPAC parent prominent in the anti-UFP effort. "It wasn't hard to get people interested."

At first, the school department had insisted on holding hearings during the month of December, arguing that a later date would delay the decision on building closings and make it difficult for the department to make a rational pupil assignment plan for the coming school year. CPAC, however, held out for January hearings, contending that parents needed more time to review the UFP thoroughly and that post-holiday hearings would draw larger numbers. Judge Garrity eventually lent his support to the later date.

As expected, the district hearings attracted considerable crowds; the threat of school closings also forged some unexpected political alliances. In District Seven, shared by Black Roxbury and White Charlestown, Powder Keg, a Charlestown anti-busing organization, supported Black parents protesting the UFP-proposed closing of Roxbury High. (If Roxbury High closed, its student body would be reassigned to Charlestown High.) "We support neighborhood schools and they have a right to theirs," explained one Charlestown leader.

Testimony at the hearings ranged from impassioned defenses of endangered schools to attacks on the planning process itself for its exclusion of parents and its "bricks and mortar" approach. Parents argued that the plan's projections had not considered factors that might stimulate population growth—return to renewal areas and the effect of the growing energy crisis on families' decisions about where to live. Parents also questioned the role educational needs had played in the UFP decisions. Many parents, especially those interested in a back-to-basics program, protested that the UFP would reduce emphasis on basic skills because older schools usually offered these programs.

CPAC also addressed one of Garrity's own criteria for the UFP—desegregation. If the plan were carried out, CPAC alleged in its statement to the court, the UFP would close a disproportionate number of schools in minority neighborhoods. In fact, if fully implemented, the plan would leave the Black portion of District Seven without a local elementary or high school. CPAC's report stated:

> The neglect of school buildings in minority neighborhoods is part of the original finding of fact in the court desegregation order. Now the deterioration resulting from this neglect is being used to justify the closing of more schools, and in effect perpetuate this discrimination. The issue of stability and equity is also significant. The recommended closings between 1978-1980 would result in 2,721 minority students (only 1,347 White students) having their education disrupted.

But, beyond all of these concerns, CPAC warned Garrity that implementing the UFP "will cause further masses of children to be uprooted, disrupted and confused. More children will then leave the system, more schools will close and the vicious cycle will continue."

Few of these arguments swayed Judge Garrity. He remarked that the UFP's population projections were proving overly optimistic. At a February hearing, he also rejected CPAC's defense of the need for stability, stating that stability and underutilized schools were "incongruous." Neither did he agree that closings unfairly burdened the Black community. To date, he noted, 33 schools had been closed and, of these, only 15 had been in the Black community.

The Boston school committee, which had also been excluded from the planning process, embraced CPAC's call for an open planning effort including all affected parties; it filed a motion before Garrity asking that he adopt such an approach. Attorneys for the city and the state Department of Education opposed school committee participation, suggesting that the school committee had expressed no commitment to the task of eliminating empty seats and might have other intentions. Attorney Sandra Lynch, speaking for the state, noted that the committee had exhibited a pattern of delay when confronted with sensitive issues such as school closings.

Politics again took a strange turn. The plaintiffs in the desegregation case—representatives of Black students and parents—came to the defense of their long-time adversary. The school committee's motion was a sound one, the attorney for the plaintiffs argued, because it emphasized community involvement. If parents were included in the planning process, they would be able to cope with unpalatable decisions to close schools, he continued.

In April 1978, Garrity admitted the planning process "was not all that it could have been," but he still maintained that it was a "basically good plan." Nevertheless, he acknowledged that standards for school closing which all parties could support would be best. As requested, Garrity made the school committee an active participant in the new planning effort.

"I think the turning back of the United Facilities Plan is CPAC's greatest success," said Henry Allen. He continued:

> This would not have been possible prior to 1974. The success was not in preventing schools from being closed —for closing schools will be necessary—but in preventing them from being closed without any consideration for the impact on education, desegregation or the neighborhoods. This was a real grassroots effort.

Having joined with parents to halt the UFP, the school committee than vanished from the scene. In Oc-

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tober 1978, the closings issue arose again, this time under recently appointed Superintendent Wood's administration. The new community planning process which allowed three months for review by council members at all three levels was set in motion. Planning groups made up of teachers, parents, school administrators and community representatives were established in each of the nine school districts. In this new round of the school closing battle, CPAC is contesting the deadlines for planning decisions, arguing that, while planners had a year to formulate their plan, parent councils have only three months to make an in-depth assessment of that plan and the issues it raises. CPAC leaders have pledged that parent groups are willing to "bite the bullet" and make "the hard decisions" about closing schools. Some school department officials are skeptical; James Breeden, the administrator in charge of the new planning process, remarked:

> School closings are not an educational or economic matter primarily. It's a political matter. There are almost always good arguments for not closing a particular school.

What parents want, he said, is time to make "an elaborate defense."

The new round of the school closing debate presents another political dilemma for the parent councils. Though the citywide council has expressed willingness to participate in decisions about closing schools, each individual parent council is clamoring to keep its school open. What was a good organizing issue when CPAC was on the attack may become divisive as parents begin making concrete plans and decisions. Some CPAC members predict that pressure from local parent groups will force the citywide body to back off from its "bite the bullet" pledge. Others believe parents can unite and accept school closings if they see the criteria as fair, uniform and beneficial to their children.

This new planning effort presents Boston parents with an opportunity to shape the future of Boston's schools even though their councils have but three months to assess the situation, make recommendations and inform the community. In this short period of time, CPAC must also convince its constituency to transcend individual crusades and address the broader issues of educational quality. Only then can CPAC, as it stated in its recommendations on the UFP, realize its vision that "when we plan for school buildings, we are planning for the future of Boston."

CITIZENS: TAKE PART! A PLAN FOR ACTION

Betsy Wachtel

Besty Wachtel serves as director of the Institute for Responsive Education's Clearinghouse on Citizen Action in Education. She is a community activist and the mother of four children.

This chapter is directed to those who want to be part of the process of fitting schools to fewer students and, in particular, to citizens willing to do the community research and homework necessary to plan in long-range but locally specific terms for the education of all children in their district.

Declining enrollment and shrinking financial resources force communities and their schools to make cutbacks in valued areas of education. Not surprisingly, citizens want to take part in developing the priorities which determine choices about what will be maintained, reallocated or eliminated. These choices affect their children's future as well as the identity and stability of their community. How can citizens help reallocate resources to benefit students? How can they share in shaping the

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future of their schools as citizens did in Salt Lake City and Lohrville, Iowa so that a period of retrenchment can become an opportunity for constructive change? What mechanisms for participation are available? What tools do participants need to understand and address the problems?

It is clear from the preceding case studies and from recent history that some approaches and practices work better than others; there are also alternative ways to organize all facets of schools from budget to program to facility use to staffing patterns. This chapter begins with a discussion of ways to participate; it then describes a planning approach and process for obtaining and using the informational tools you will require. You will need to adapt these suggestions to what is feasible for your organization or council and the specific problems of your community.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

School systems now recognize the need for citizen participation. Without citizen support, the survival of those governing, administering and teaching in schools is threatened. Crisis-oriented systems which refuse to respond openly and informatively to the dissatisfied and tax-conscious find themselves unable to make changes. The uproar and resistance are too great. In these circumstances, closing schools is next to impossible and likely to result in ouster of school board members and superintendents. The climate of distrust created does not permit even the most minor organizational changes.

As a National Institute of Education report, *Declining Enrollment: The Challenge of the Coming Decade*, notes, "The phenomenon of declining enrollment will most likely have a greater impact on education in the next decade than any other foreseeable trend."[1] School administrators are now aware of the consequences of

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bypassing the citizenry and operating in crisis fashion. Massachusetts' Commissioner of Education Gregory Anrig recently called on those governing schools to open the forum and respond to critics and supporters alike "in order to strengthen the natural allies of education and attract new support in a time of retrenchment."[2] Not only is this an opportunity for citizens to participate effectively in matters directly affecting them, it is also a period when right-to-information and open meeting laws make participation possible even in the face of resistance. This post-Watergate legislation upholds the citizens' right to information and their right to attend almost all deliberative sessions of governing bodies when those sessions affect the public. Many state and federal programs also mandate the participation of citizens in school decisions. In short, the climate for participation, especially in the area of declining enrollment, is more favorable than it has been before.

HOW DO YOU PARTICIPATE?

There are four basic structures through which citizens participate in planning for declining enrollment. Each structure can be characterized according to the group's beginnings, focus, permanency and representativeness. The types of structures are councils, special task forces, districtwide groups and neighborhood groups.

1. Councils

Many citizens already serve on councils initiated by the local school system or by state mandates. These can be structured in one, two or three tiers. For example, Salt Lake City's shared governance councils are single-tiered, and exist at each of the schools in that district. Berkeley's system includes local and districtwide councils. Boston has a three-tiered local, district and citywide system of parent advisory councils. The tiered structure

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has the advantage of providing opportunities for mediation between neighborhood, district and citywide concerns.

These councils are permanent structures with broad focus and scope which allow them to be involved with all facets of education. They are usually structured to represent all segments of the community. Their roles and functions are predetermined and their authority generally advisory. Although initiated and presumably supported by school boards and administrators, councils often have difficulty obtaining the information they need to make independent recommendations. For more information on the structure, enabling legislation and effectiveness of these councils, see *Sharing the Power? A Report on the Status of School Councils in the 1970's*, IRE's Advisory Council packets, and *Overcoming Barriers to School Council Effectiveness.*[3]

2. Special Task Forces

Special task forces or committees are often set up to study a particular problem such as declining enrollment. These are short-term, single-purpose, narrow-focus committees. If a problem is complex, school systems often establish several different committees to study individual aspects such as facilities, budget and program. As was the case in Lexington, Massachusetts, these committees tend to be hand-picked by the superintendent or school board and do not represent the entire community. Although the school system initiates these committees, it does not often provide them with the data or staff support necessary to make informed recommendations. The experiences of Berkeley's Master Plan Facilities Committee reflect this problem.

If these committees acquire knowledge equal to that of professionals, they often prove to be quite independent. Each of Lexington's three committees, for example, arrived at recommendations which altered the board's plans. In Berkeley, the committee did not arrive at the expected end point—recommendations legitimating a decision already made by the board. Though castigated by a board member for having "run amuck," this committee managed to make public its recommendations, including criticism of school management and operations.

These committees are often very effective, particularly as they tend to be made up of community professionals. Many insist on long-range planning even though their life is short-term. Committees which are assigned only certain aspects of a problem, however, may well have difficulty maintaining an understanding of the total problem.

3. Independent Districtwide Groups

Districtwide groups outside the school system include self-initiated citywide parent groups, PTAs and League of Women Voters groups which research districtwide issues. These groups have the advantage of independence from school professionals and the disadvantage of having to obtain information from those same professionals. Although districtwide groups could represent the entire community, they generally reflect the opinions of those segments of the community with sufficient time and interest to pursue districtwide issues.

After they achieve internal consensus, districtwide groups present their recommendations to the board and public. Such groups may or may not have a recognized role in the community, but they usually possess sufficient clout and knowledge to influence school boards. Their broad focus and long-term nature give them the potential to make a strong impact on their districts. Members must walk a tightrope between district and neighborhood concerns, but maintaining this balance strengthens their position.

4. Independent Neighborhood Groups

Neighborhood groups often rally to oppose threats such as school closings. These self-initiated, single-issue groups are generally temporary organizations which focus on local issues and represent only one neighborhood. They have difficulty obtaining cooperation and information from the school system and often find that, even if they succeed one year, they have to wage the same battle the next. Their clout generally depends on their political power and know-how. Two such groups which bear comparison are the Ventura parents in Palo Alto who were unable to save their school and the John Swett group successfully organized by Danny McGettigan in San Francisco. Both were racially and ethnically mixed schools whose reputation for good multicultural programs drew students from other areas; both were also in neighborhoods which historically had little clout. The San Francisco group's success depended largely on its political ability.

Neighborhood groups often meet their goal but are then unable to move beyond their limited focus to change system policies. As they are pushed into defending their schools, they find it difficult to concern themselves with their community's entire educational system. The material in this chapter is of limited use to such groups unless they can adopt both a broader perspective and a long-range planning approach.

These case studies and IRE's research point to general recommendations about how to focus your participation so you can deal as effectively as possible with the problems presented by declining enrollment.

- If at all possible, ensure that your group or committee represents the entire community; if this is impossible, it is even more important that you survey at least a sample of every segment of your community. (One way to survey your community is discussed later in this chapter.)
- If you serve on a committee or council, make sure at the outset that your committee's role and authority are clear.
- Try to get your school system to make a commitment to provide staff assistance in rounding up all the information you will require. Insist on sufficient time for research, deliberation, and soliciting ideas and proposals from the whole community. If the system obliges you to respond on a crisis timetable, your participation may not be worth your time and effort.
- Do all you can to keep the scope of study broad so you can consider systemwide goals and alternatives in every area of school program management. If you serve on a special study committee researching one aspect of a problem, meet with the committees researching other aspects at least monthly; also, meet with the other committees before each of you prepares your final recommendations.
- Beware of participating on a committee whose mandate is to determine which school to close! School systems which are generally unresponsive to their communities but which wish to appear fiscally responsible often conclude early that the response to the "crisis" is to close schools. They then pass the buck by appointing committees to make the difficult decision—which school to close. If you take on this responsibility, you have two choices:

  1) Meet the mandate, choose a school on the most likely basis—in this case, age of facility—and take the flak. Outraged citizens will defend their schools, pointing to others as better candidates for closure,

and attack your criteria because they are not educationally based.

2) You may react as the Berkeley Master Plan Facilities Committee did after discovering the inadequacy of data and rationales for making decisions to close schools. They refused to recommend closing any school and made public their suggestions for better school operations, information gathering and planning.

- Include students on your planning team. This often overlooked group is most affected by any decisions made and can provide useful contributions.

AN APPROACH TO DECLINING ENROLLMENT: LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND REEVALUATION

Citizens and administrators in Salt Lake City and Iowa have found educational and community benefits from retrenchment. In Colorado, research shows fewer dropouts and increased achievement scores in districts where enrollment is declining.[4] Declining enrollment can present an opportunity—the "chance to stop and change direction" as a Lexington school board member said. It provides the opportunity to reevaluate what is most important in education, to assess the community's educational goals and the degree to which the schools satisfy these, and to reexamine the entire fabric of your school system. This reassessment can tie the educational system more directly to the community's present priorities and needs than to preexisting assumptions about its needs.

It is important to start by exploring all alternatives. If you begin with a limited focus as Berkeley and Lexington did with their facility assessment, the possible scope of your response is limited. (The answers you get

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depend on the questions you ask.) As you consider all the alternatives, match them with the community's educational priorities and weigh their long-range implications. Try to assess whether the possible changes will result in a school which, ten years from now, will not only achieve the community's expressed priorities but also respond to new student needs.

Information You Need to Plan

In order to plan effectively for the future you must build an information base. You will need to draw on the following information: 1) past and future enrollment trends and a community profile; 2) a survey of the community's expectations of its schools; 3) budget information including an understanding of the sources of funds and the management of school district operations; 4) a staff inventory; 5) an inventory of facilities and proposed alternate uses; and 6) an understanding of program needs.

Descriptions of how to obtain this information and put it to use follow. Where information is easy to obtain but the method complicated to explain, the method is briefly described and then references are made to materials which explore the method in further detail.

Sources of Help

Your community can provide various types of expertise and assistance as you gather your information. Local businesses and corporations might be willing to help you with economic forecasts, survey tabulation and evaluation. Businesses sometimes loan specialists to community groups on a part-time basis. Local government bodies such as the Town Clerk's office, Bureau of Vital Statistics and Planning or Zoning Boards can provide demographic data and assist with future trend forecasting. Your local reference librarian may offer time-saving hints about where to seek out information. Usually, these sources will give you information and advice on whom to talk to next. As the sources of information are linked, so are the various bits and pieces of information you are gathering. It is likely that your larger geographical area has a university and, perhaps attached to it, a nonprofit research center or program which could provide technical expertise. Schools of Education, Economics, Geography and Urban Planning may well turn up not only free advice but an advocate willing to serve as a volunteer consultant.

State agencies for Youth Services and Education and regional offices of federal departments such as Health, Education and Welfare or Housing and Urban Development possess a vast array of technical information about government funding sources and a sense for the range of what is happening nationwide. This book's **Resource List** also recommends publications from across the country which address the different areas affected by declining enrollment.

Information Tools

1. The Demographics of Your Community: Future Projections and a Community Profile

School offices will be able to provide you with data on past and present enrollments for each school area. You will also want to find out the number of live births in the past five-year period. If your district does not have preschool age census figures, hospitals can provide you with that information. Then you can estimate future kindergarten enrollment.[5] It is now possible to project future enrollments for the next five years using the cohort survival method, also called the grade progression method. This involves determining the retention ratio of the number of children in, for example, grade one who continue to the second grade the next year. The average percentage of survival (or retention) for each grade level can be adjusted if demographic changes so indicate. This method takes into account patterns of in- and out-migration, the public-nonpublic school relationship, and the holding power at each grade level. The process for computing these ratios is described in step-by-step detail in the Michigan Department of Education's Task Force report, *Michigan's School Enrollment Decline: Projections and Implications.*[6]

As the Michigan report indicates, you will want to look at the causes of decline in enrollment and the likelihood of growth or change in the future. If your town is a first-ring suburb like Skokie, Illinois or Newton, Massachusetts, you probably share the following characteristics. These towns experienced tremendous growth in the late fifties and sixties and are now fully developed. Their population has aged and housing prices are beyond the reach of young families; almost no growth is anticipated and school enrollments will continue to decline. The town of Newton typifies this situation: parents of school-age children account for 35 percent of the taxpayers—each student in the schools is supported by three taxpayers. Trends such as these significantly change the character of a town and affect support for public education.

As you explore enrollment trends, you will want to take into account other factors affecting community change. Local experts such as realtors and commercial property brokers can tell you of anticipated changes in housing stock or business potential. Local highway departments can alert you to changes in transportation and town officials can inform you about impending zoning changes. If the school department has provided you with projections, you will want to check the influence of these other factors on those projections.

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School departments or committees often hire professional demographers. Many systems have done so with success, but some, such as Skokie, have based their planning on professional projections which have proved dramatically incorrect. Using the school system's projections will save time, but only if you ensure that their projections take the local situation into account and allow for the types of change which may cause your enrollments to plummet or boom.

You now have sufficient data to map each area of the school district by present and projected enrollment. You will notice that the pattern of decline is uneven; there may even be population growth in adjacent outlying areas. Your map can also show which levels of school—elementary or secondary—are now and will be hardest hit by decline.

It is helpful now to overlay this map with descriptive demographic data for each school area in your district. Your own knowledge of neighborhoods plus that found in local agencies and the census will provide the data you need: average age and income of the population in each school area; racial and ethnic characteristics; distinguishing local site characteristics; availability and cost of housing; commercial properties and community agencies located in each school area; potential areas of expansion. Knowledge of individual neighborhoods enhances your understanding of both the significance of a school to a neighborhood and the possible impact of changing school boundaries or relocating students. Once the overlays are in place, it becomes important to understand your community's attitudes towards its schools.

2. Community Survey: Expectations and Satisfaction

A reevaluation of your schools depends on assessment of the present situation, an assessment which clearly

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belongs with your community. Schools exist to serve the citizens who support them financially and the citizens, in turn, depend on the schools to translate their educational priorities into a future for their children. Therefore, as this planning approach indicates, begin at the beginning!

A community survey can be an effective tool for determining your community's expectations of its schools, its satisfaction with the present system, and areas where the community sees a need for change. The survey will provide you with a sense of the educational values and priorities on which you will want to base reallocation decisions. A survey also allows you to give due and significant attention to minority opinions which are often overlooked.

Ideally, you should survey the entire community as the CAL school in Iowa did. As this is not generally feasible, you can draw a random sample from each school (in order to include the opinions of staff and senior high school students) and area in your district. Techniques for drawing a random sample are described in *Facts for a Change: Citizen Action Research for Better Schools*.[7]

There are three possible types of survey, each of which has its own limitations and advantages:

- Face-to-face interview: Requires a high rate of volunteer time per interview but produces a high return rate.
- Telephone interview: Omits those not having phones although you can compensate with direct interviews. Requires high rate of volunteer time; response rate high as this allows for return calls.

- Mail-out questionnaire: Requires time and commitment of respondent. Response rate is considerably lower.

Your choice of survey depends, again, on feasibility. Perhaps a variation such as mailing out questionnaires and then arranging for volunteers to pick them up will be your solution. Your school department might even be willing to mail them out for you at the lower bulk mail rate to which they have access. High school political science classes or groups such as the League of Women Voters, Parent Teacher Association and Scouts have traditionally been enlisted to pick up surveys or conduct telephone interviews. School departments and local businesses may help you with the costs of production or computation of results. All of these involvements produce benefits; those participating become more committed and more informed. Some suggestions for drawing up your questionnaire follow.

- Ensure anonymity. Note school or neighborhood area.
- Begin your questionnaire with a paragraph giving your reasons for conducting the survey and the use you plan to make of it. Explain the demographic trends and enrollment problems causing budgetary pressures and requiring reallocation decisions. Ask for help in making determinations about what is most valued in the present system and what is working well.
- Gear your survey to local programs and emphases.
- Try to cover the most important areas of life in your schools. These might include opportunities for participation and individualization, adequacy of discipline and student access to teachers.
- If you are in doubt about the importance of certain questions, include them. You may not have a second chance to ask!

- Ask closed-ended questions, but allow for a range of answers by, for example, ranking responses:

  > Are you satisfied with the way discipline is handled in your school? Please answer on a scale of one to three, "one" meaning not satisfied, "two" somewhat satisfied, "three" entirely satisfied. ____ . Other ____ .

  (This way you do not force respondents to make choices if they have no opinion or a conditional answer.)

- If you foresee cutbacks, ask respondents to make choices which indicate what they value most. For example:

  > If extracurricular programs are cut back, which program would you prefer to see reduced?

  Again, allow for ranking of answers.

- Tap into expectations and satisfactions; try to find out if the individual's educational goals are now being realized.

  Allow space for comments. Even though you may not be able to tabulate the comments, they provide you with a deeper understanding of your respondents' views.

- You might ask an open-ended question at the end such as:

  > If you could make three changes in the schools, what would they be?

  You may find there is a community consensus about an ideal school. This type of question also provides a second check on problem areas.

- After you have completed your questionnaire and before you print it, pre-test it. This is a very important step—it allows you to see whether your questions are open to misinterpretation. For examples of questionnaires and advice as to how to develop them, see the footnotes at the end of this chapter.[8]

You will probably need help tabulating and evaluating your results. The same volunteer groups which helped with your survey may be willing to help with the basic tabulations. You may want to express the data in tables or bar graphs with explanations which note significant responses.

It is extremely useful to have access to a research expert who can help evaluate the significance of your data and draw correlations between answers. If you cannot recruit such a resource person, you may want to hire an independent consultant whose presence can relieve you of accusations of bias. Research evaluation experts can also help you put your material into a clear form which stands up under professional scrutiny.

As you analyze and summarize your results, you will be able to draw conclusions about your community's expectations of its schools and how well the schools meet these expectations. You will gain a sense for what is valued most and where reallocation of resources is most needed. When you have gathered all your information—including the facilities and staff inventories and the budget and program information—and have started to explore alternatives, you can see how well various alternatives address the community needs expressed through the survey.

As you have involved citizens and made them aware of the problem and your intention to find solutions corresponding with their concerns and priorities, it is important to get back to your community with your findings. Keep them informed of the progress of your study. You can publish your survey results in newspapers, flyers and newsletters or, if possible, on television or radio. You have now completed the second link in the chain of information which you are forging.

3. School Budget and Efficiency of Operations

It is logical to expect that fewer students will mean fewer tax dollars spent on education. In fact, expenditures continue at the same level or can even rise as enrollment declines. Many of the costs of education such as facilities operation, utilities, maintenance and building loan payments are fixed. Inflation, energy costs, collective bargaining agreements with negotiated salary increases, and mandated special education and vocational education programs increase costs yearly. Teacher and central administration staff can not be reduced at a rate commensurate with decreasing enrollment. For example, a loss of three students each in two second grade classes with 22 students apiece would not permit consolidation and the layoff of a teacher.

Districts which depend on a state aid formula based on gross membership allowance may experience a loss of over $1000 for every pupil lost![9] When the Livonia, Michigan public schools lost 30 pupils, they also lost $33,472 in state aid to their district.[10] If your schools are subject to this penalizing situation, consider lobbying at the state level with other districts. People United for Rural Education (PURE) has shown that residents of many districts can band together to lobby the legislature for local tax flexibility to produce fiscal relief.

Some states have already legislated adjustments for declining enrollment. This legislation generally provides a cushion from the immediate impact of declining enrollment by counting only half the pupil decline the first year or by averaging enrollments over a three-year period. These measures, however, only delay the loss of state aid. Schools need additional aid to deal with the increased per pupil costs resulting from enrollment declines.

Be wary of reliance on per pupil ratios. They are useful in times of growth or when comparing operating costs between schools of the same size, but they are ratios. A per pupil ratio is simply the total cost of operating a school divided by the number of pupils in that school; any decline in the bottom figure will increase the ratio. Therefore, the per pupil ratio or cost per child can increase while total costs remain the same. Even if a system makes cuts to maintain its total operating budget at the same level as the previous year, its per pupil ratio will increase with the loss of only a few pupils. Sometimes, this ratio is then used to make it look like the overall costs of education have risen.

It is important to inform your community about these budgetary facts of life. It is also important to look at other assessment tools which reflect educational efficiency, not just economic efficiency. The town of Arlington, Massachusetts relies on a program budget rather than per pupil ratios to describe its educational efficiency. This way of examining budgets allows you to see the exact cost of each program offered with personnel and supply components included. If your school department can provide you with such a budget or is willing to translate the traditional line item budget into a program budget, you will have a more relevant and accurate means of examining the costs of education. As you study your school's budget, look at fixed and flexible costs. While you may find a few fat areas, it is too early to make any decisions about cutbacks. Wait until you have gathered all your information, especially that about staff and facilities.

You can also examine your district's system for purchasing food, fuel, library and instructional materials, and special services such as special education.

- Could these purchases be pooled with other districts to obtain a more competitive price? As the case study from Iowa indicates, special education and enrichment ser-

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vices can be cooperatively pooled; the state of Minnesota also lowers costs through Educational Cooperative Service units.

- Has your system explored federal and state funding for special programs as Salt Lake City and Lohrvlle, Iowa did? In Salt Lake City, teachers and administrators became proposal writers and brought in funds for additional program support and innovation.
- Are there services such as transportation and food services which could be provided less expensively by leasing them or taking them on as a school cost? Can students fill curriculum requirements and, at the same time, provide services such as computerizing information, cataloging library materials, tutoring or assisting with the preparation of lunch?
- You may want to explore coordination and exchange of services with local government offices. Do your schools duplicate the services of community agencies such as library and health services? Might a merger supply these services better and at lower cost? Are there grounds and maintenance functions now performed by school personnel which municipal departments could provide less expensively?

Many other alternatives can also reduce costs—staff reduction, grade reorganization and school closings. These are discussed later but you will want to weigh each alternative in light of all the information you obtain.

4. *Staff Inventory*

You can also inventory your administrative, instructional and personnel resources. To do so, you need the following information about each individual: tenured or non-tenured? Length of service in your school system? Certification at what level and in what program? Present salary with step increments and cost of living increases projected for the next five years?

You may find that your system gave tenure freely during growth years and that your tenured teacher force represents 90 percent of the total force. You must then examine your system's collective bargaining agreements for reduction-in-force policies. Generally, these policies reduce personnel by first maintaining tenured teachers over non-tenured and then reducing within tenured ranks by seniority. Policies which retain teachers by seniority make deep inroads into affirmative action because encouragement to hire minority teachers is a recent development. Using seniority alone has created New York City's aging work force situation—its average teacher age has increased from 30 in the early 1970's to over age 40 in 1978.[11] This situation allows for almost no influx of younger teachers and new ideas; it makes retraining and inservice training programs important. You may want to consider diverting more funds to workshops, visits to other schools and paid in-school time when teachers can discuss creative curriculum collaboratively.

It is helpful to go back five years and develop an average of the numbers of teachers and staff leaving the system yearly. The attrition rate might be increased by providing financial incentives for early retirement as Salt Lake City did. Some states such as Iowa encourage teachers to obtain multicertification and principals to teach. Salt Lake City has developed pools so specialized teachers can serve the entire district. For those teachers who welcome part-time teacher loads, job sharing can also produce savings.

If at all possible, it is very important to explore alternatives with teachers and administrators. A discussion which affects their jobs will be threatening but staff and teachers can participate in creating fair and equal policies for teacher reduction or relocation by sharing in open discussions of the alternatives.

5. *Facilities Inventory*

As you approach a facilities investigation, remember to keep it that! School boards often pressure committees and councils to think in terms of closing schools to demonstrate immediate savings and fiscal responsibility. School boards have formed committees with the directive, "You decide which school to close." It is too early to make this decision; back up and collect all your information first, then consider the alternatives. You will want to include the following information in your inventory of facilities: how old the building is; what its present enrollment and capacity are; how it aids or limits program (educational adequacy); what its operating costs and renovation needs are; what its particular assets, liabilities and site characteristics are; and, how marketable it is or, what could you sell it for and to whom?

Minnesota's *Planning Assistance Manual* suggests collection of the following information to arrive at projected operating costs: 1) determine total capacity by grade level; 2) deduct from this capacity inadequate space; 3) determine renovation needs, then readjust usable capacity to include costs of renovation; 4) fit in enrollment projections; and 5) compare operating costs on a per pupil basis.[12]

When you have gathered your data, consider your options in the light of maintaining and improving education with the least possible dislocation. Your inventory will probably show that some schools are underutilized, some overcrowded and some below minimum facility standards. There are then three major alternatives: altering the present use of space by grade reorganization or redrawing school boundaries; sharing space; and, closing a facility to school use and leasing, mothballing or selling it.

If there is only a slight excess of space in a building, that space can be put to innovative use. Special education or enrichment programs and school services like guidance and the library might benefit from additional space. Perhaps you can reassign students or redraw boundaries to use available space in an underutilized school for students from a congested school. (Be sure, however, that your reassignments do not cause segregation.) A centrally located school may well lend itself to use as a magnet or vocational education school.

Sharing space is an interesting alternative: many systems lease space to other community services while maintaining the school program there. This type of joint occupancy can enrich secondary school curriculum by providing internships in community services located within the building. The John F. Kennedy School and Community Center in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, was built to house the school and a "shopping center of social services under one roof." Included in the center are a day care center, a senior citizens center, public health offices and a number of public service agencies. Huntsville, Alabama responded to a severe decline in enrollment when the rocket program moved to Houston by incorporating a community theatre, carpentry shop and day care center into its schools.

Another way to use space in underutilized schools is to incorporate daytime adult education programs. Adults now attend high school classes in Framingham, Massachusetts and Great Neck, Long Island. These new uses expand schools into learning and resource centers for all age groups and the whole community. They also allow a neighborhood to retain its school as a community center.

If you find the pattern of decline is not limited to a few schools but crosses the district at a certain age level, reexamine grade structuring. If, for example, decline affects only the middle schools, you might consider adding one grade at each school. Or, it may be that decline has passed this age group by and affects the secondary level; then it might be beneficial to move the ninth grade from the middle schools to the high schools as Salt Lake City did. These changes require responsiveness to the needs of the age group affected; transition plans should include orientation sessions and additional guidance services.

Community people lecturing and volunteering in classrooms, area cooperative services and teacher pools can all enrich small programs. Perhaps students taking advanced electives with small enrollments can take them at a neighboring school or community college. Use of space should be flexible and based on student needs and program requirements, not simply on teacher-pupil ratios.

School Closings

Some important items to remember as you consider school closings are cost savings, criteria for closure, neighborhood impact and alternate use or sale of the building. Savings from closings rarely approach those heralded by school departments. Most school systems find that evaluation of projected savings after a three to five year period show little if any actual savings. Although maintenance of unused space is expensive—it is estimated at $2.00 per square foot in the Northeast[11]—leasing and reallocation of space for administrative offices or special programs can take up the slack. Reassignments do not always reduce costs either. Teachers and administrative staff make the transition with the reassigned students or are absorbed elsewhere in the district. Costs of transportation may increase and often programs and teachers are added to service the increased population in the remaining schools.

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Professional educators and school boards have too often used age of facility to determine which school to close. This is not acceptable to the neighborhoods affected. It says nothing about the quality of education within that school, as the Lexington Educational Program Study Committee report and the experience of the Ventura school clearly show. Parents often oppose a closing based solely on age of facility even when they accept the need for some closings.

It is important to understand the importance of neighborhood schools to their communities. Few want their school closed and their children bused out of the neighborhood. The extent of many neighborhoods' defense of their schools has shocked many. These case studies and recent history show that, in the absence of community understanding of the educational reasons for closing schools, disruption, resistance, hostility and even violence may result. The cases also show that communities can accept the decision to close their schools if they are convinced it will benefit their children. The Citywide Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) parents in Boston and Henry Der of Chinese for Affirmative Action in San Francisco both felt their communities would have accepted closure had the reasons been educationally sound. The cases certainly make clear that communities should not close schools like California's John Swett and Ventura, schools with unusual multicultural programs which make them magnets for the entire community.

Schools chosen to be closed are usually in neighborhoods with the least political clout.[14] These neighborhoods can least afford to lose their schools; they often serve as community meeting places and adult education centers. Where schools have been closed in these less stable and usually poorer communities, there is evidence that neighborhood businesses are hurt, that the sense of community and minority identification is weakened, and that those who can afford to move do so, thus ensuring further decline.[11]

When closing schools, you must also consider what to do with the facilities to be closed. Will they be mothballed or sold? Mothballing—closing pending further use—can cause problems: the building can depreciate rapidly; shutdowns can be costly; and the building is likely to be vandalized. It is an eyesore and constant reminder to the neighborhood that it was not valued.

Marketability is the main factor in selling a facility. Old buildings in the center of town have far less commercial value—unless they have unusual architectual or historic value like the Hancock school in Lexington, Massachusetts and the Willard school in Berkeley—than newer buildings, most of which were erected in the sixties to meet the baby boom. The newer buildings tend to be located in outlying areas near highways. Marketable features such as air conditioning, large lots, parking and athletic facilities make them attractive to commercial developers. The land could even be used for housing developments which might increase school enrollments. School boards and communities are often reluctant to part with modern buildings for which they are often still paying, but these are more marketable. The Skokie case study dramatizes how crucial it is to consider marketability early, before a decision has been made to close a particular school.

6. *Educational Program Needs*

This area is the last resort where nobody wants to make cutbacks. Program is the heart of education and all parties—teachers, students, administrators and parents—feel it must be maintained as the top priority. Historically, when cutbacks have been at the elementary

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level, they have affected art, music, physical education and classroom support personnel. At the secondary level, electives are the first to go, especially languages and higher mathematics.

As you consider program, look first at fixed programs required by federal and state legislation or as core curriculum. Then separate out those programs which your community survey found to be extremely successful. Fixed and successful programs might be enriched and their funding increased by adding adult students during the day or changing classroom groupings. Basically, you will not want to tamper with successful programs but you will want to make sure that their management and operation is as efficient as possible.

As you examine elective and enrichment courses, consider the following options. Students in low enrollment electives might be able to take these courses on a voucher basis at a nearby community college or they could take specific electives at several larger district schools. Some courses can be taught by a districtwide teaching pool. Magnet schools for program areas like the arts or vocational education can also lessen pressure on local schools.

Districtwide and multidistrict collaboration should be considered. Such collaboratives are easily formed and mutually beneficial: they permit sharing of specialized teachers, combined sponsorship of programs, and injection of renowned guest lecturers—artists, authors, business and professional people. In Boston, for example, the school department is considering a plan to mesh programs with community resources, a plan which will cost no more and possibly less than present programs. The plan, a response to student desires for direct experience, calls for establishment of centers in Boston's art and science museums, aquarium, colleges, government agencies and business community.[16]

Many creative program solutions can result from recognizing the reality of a changing community. Schools can and do enlarge their populations and services to educate the full spectrum of the community. They can offer day care services, prekindergarten programs, parenting classes and adult education. Almost half—45 percent—of all children now live in a single parent family at some point in their school years;[17] they may need additional counseling. The job market is likely to become increasingly tight as the population grows older and larger percentages of adults work full-time and live longer. Increasing demands will be made on vocational education programs and on career guidance counselors who must research future job market possibilities and ensure that the secondary curriculum addresses these futures.

Program considerations also involve discussions of maximum and minimum class size. As seen in the Iowa and Lexington case studies, small schools offer the advantages of individualization, greater opportunities for participation and leadership, and close student-teacher relationships. Larger student bodies generally permit greater breadth of program and enrichment courses. It is possible to have the best of both if you consider class size and time periods as variables which depend on program needs and differ according to content and student needs. For example, lectures can address large numbers for an hour while reading programs may require small classes and short periods of time equal to young children's ability to concentrate. Flexibility of time and class size can free teacher time and better serve student needs. In a small school, it is possible to approach the breadth and depth of larger schools' program offerings if you use resources such as area cooperatives, teaching pools, community college vouchers and resource

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volunteers. Look at the curriculum the CAL school provides to 130 students!

If you do expect to recommend program changes, you will want to base them on student needs and the educational priorities emerging from your survey. Major changes often require phased introduction over a period of years, long term evaluation and continued reassessment.

Your Decisions

At this point, you will have developed a concrete sense of your community's educational priorities. Your knowledge will be grounded in fact and based on a study of alternatives. You may well be better informed than any other group, including the professionals; your viewpoint also has the advantage of being districtwide and based on all relevant factors, not just financial ones. You now have some hard decisions to make: some, requiring coordination of services and personnel, will invoke no controversy; others are trade-offs in which you lose in one place to make gains elsewhere; still others involve school closings and teacher layoffs which will affect entire neighborhoods and, sometimes, your entire community.

As you make your decisions, you will see how changes in one area cause changes in others and you will be glad you did a community survey. For example, your demographic projections may show that decline will persist in elementary and middle schools for the next four years; your facility and enrollment data may show that of four middle schools, three are underenrolled. A professional planner might then find it logical to close the X school, an older building near a newer middle school. You, however, may have program information which points to X as a school renowned for its curriculum, a Ventura or a John Swett which attracts students from the whole district. Your community survey may also show that the community values such programs. Thus, you may begin to look at the other three schools to find a better candidate for closing. (You should not, however, ignore the possibility of adding a grade to each school if you think this addition would be educationally sound.)

School Y might be the next choice of professional planners but you might decide to pass up Y because its neighborhood uses Y as a center for many of its community activities. You might also decide Y is not a good school to close because its community is not very stable economically and a closing would contribute to futher decline of the whole neighborhood. You may therefore choose to close School A or School B, both of which are newer but located in communities less subject to the negative effects of the dislocations caused by school closings.

Any recommendation to close a school should be accompanied by an educational rationale understandable to the whole district. Any neighborhood singled out for closure will feel persecuted and will respond with counter-arguments. Therefore, should you decide a school has to be closed, your decision must be as fair as possible. It should also demonstrate benefits to those affected. These benefits might include enlarged program offerings, access to specialized equipment and greater opportunities for participation and development through extracurricular programs.

If you have been successful in informing and including many citizens throughout your information building and planning process, you may find ready community support for your recommendations. It is important to explain clearly the process you used, the alternatives you examined, and the educational rationale on which you based your decisions. Make certain your report is publicized through newspapers, newsletters, public hearings and on local radio or television stations. Making your information public helps raise the community's consciousness about the purpose and effectiveness of its schools. It also builds a potentially stronger base of community support for schools.

Finally, try to build in a continuing yearly review of your schools which pays particular attention to accommodations made to declining enrollment. This allows reevaluation of a situation subject to dramatic shifts and provides for a continued check on whether or not changing community educational goals are being met. It is important, too, that those of you who have gained so much districtwide expertise continue to influence the schools and promote a *broadening* role for citizens.

FOOTNOTES

Citizens: Take Part!
A Plan for Action

1. Susan Abramowitz and Stuart Rosenfeld, ed., *Declining Enrollments: The Challenge of the Coming Decade* (Washington, D.C: National Institute of Education, 1968), Preface, p. xiii.

2. Muriel Cohen, "Schools Warned on High Costs," *Boston Globe*, 31 October 1976.

3. Don Davies, et al., *Sharing the Power? A Report on the Status of School Councils in the 1970's.* (Boston, Mass: Institute for Responsive Education, 1978). Jim Stanton, ed., *Clearinghouse Information Packets on School-Community Councils: Packet I, Legislation, Regulation and Reports; Packet II, Rationale and Methods; Packet III, Council Guidelines; Packet IV, Resource Directory of National, State and Local Organizations* (Boston, Mass: Institute for Responsive Education, 1978). Jim Stanton and Ross Zerchykov, *Overcoming Barriers to School Council Effectiveness* (Boston, Mass: Institute for Responsive Education, 1979).

4. Mark Rodekohr, Adjustments of Colorado School Districts to Declining Enrollment, Report to IBS Subcommittee on Academic Disciplines of the Study Commission on Undergraduate Education and the Education of Teachers, University of Nebraska, September, 1974.

5. Michigan's School Enrollment Decline: Projections and Implications. A Report of the Michigan Department of Education Task Force, 1977, p. 26.

6. Ibid., pp. 26-30. See also Susan Moore Johnson, *Declining Enrollments in the Massachusetts Public Schools: What It Means and What To Do* (Boston, Mass: Massachusetts Department of Education, Bureau of Information Services, 1978) pp. 52-55.

7. Bill Burges, *Facts for a Change: Citizen Action Research for Better Schools* (Boston, Mass: Institute for Responsive Education, 1976) pp. 70-74.

8. Ibid., pp. 66-96 for information on how to draw up and evaluate questionnaires. Also, questionnaire samples from the towns of Nahant, Lincoln-Sudbury, and Dover-Sherborn, Mass. available from the Institute for Responsive Education.

9. Michigan School Enrollment Decline: Projections and Implications, Preface, p. xviii.

10. Ibid., p. 35.

11. Abramowitz and Rosenfeld, ed., *Declining Enrollments: The Challenge of the Coming Decade*, p. 266.

12. Planning for Declining Enrollments: Planning Assistance Manual and Case Studies. Minnesota Association of School Administrators, Minnesota State Department of Education, Minnesota State Planning Agency and University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, July, 1976, p. 17.

13. Johnson, *Declining Enrollments in Massachusetts Public Schools, p.26.*

14. Leonard Bornstein, "Deciding to Close a School: Economic or Political Process?" *School Leader* (New Jersey School Boards Association, November/December 1977) pp. 11-13.

15. *Schools and Neighborhood Research Study: Phase One, Executive Summary* (Seattle, Washington: Seattle Public Schools, December 1976).

16. *The Greening of the High School: A Report from the Educational Facilities Laboratory and I.D.E.A.* (Dayton, Ohio, March 1973) p. 21.

17 Dr. Katherine Eisenberger, speech presented at the Conference on Declining Enrollment, sponsored by the Massachusetts and New England Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Worcester, Mass., 20 October 1978.

RESOURCE LIST

A number of excellent publications are available on declining enrollment and responses to this problem. They are listed below by category.

The Total Problem and Its Solution

Susan Abramowitz and Stuart Rosenfeld, ed., *Declining Enrollments: The Challenge of the Coming Decade* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1978).

Jerry D. Bailey, ed., et al., *Declining Enrollments and School Closings,* Report of the Regional Conference on Declining Enrollments and School Closings: Problems and Solutions, University of Kansas, 1976.

Susan Moore Johnson, *Declining School Enrollments in the Massachusetts Public Schools; What It Means and What to Do* (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Department of Education, Bureau of Educational Information Services, 1978).

National School Public Relations Association, *Declining Enrollment: Current Trends in School Policies and Programs* (Arlington, Va.: National School Public Relations Association, 1976).

Some task force documents also address the total picture and offer their methodologies for approaching this problem:

Educational Program Study Committee Report to the Lexington School Committee, Lexington, Mass., February 1976.

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Final Report, Senior High School Study, Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Md., June, 1968.

Planning for Declining Enrollments, Planning and Assistance Manual and Case Studies, Minnesota State Department of Education, Minnesota State Planning Agency and University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn., 1976.

Michigan Department of Education Task Force Report, *Michigan's School Enrollment Decline: Projections and Implications,* Lansing, Mich., 1977.

Report of the Task Force on Declining Enrollment, Seattle, Wash., 1976.

Facility Use

The Educational Facilities Laboratory, *Surplus Space: Options and Opportunities* (New York: Educational Facilities Laboratory, 1976). See also their publications entitled *Fewer Pupils/Surplus Space: A Report* (1974), and *The Secondary School: Reduction, Renewal, and Real Estate: A Report* (1976).

Katherine T. Eisenberger, "Closing a School: Some Ways to Ease the Trauma," *School Management* (August-September, 1974), pp. 33-36.

Surveys

Bill Burges, *Facts for a Change: Citizen Action Research for Better Schools* (Boston, Mass.: Institute for Responsive Education, 1976).

Sample surveys are available from the Institute for

Responsive Education, 704 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Mass., 02215.

Participation

Don Davies, et al., *Sharing the Power? A Report on the Status of School Councils in the 1970's* (Boston, Mass.: Institute for Responsive Education, 1978).

Ronald L. Nuttall, *Positions on Declining Enrollment Issues and School Values Commitment* (Boston, Mass.: Laboratory for Statistical and Policy Research, 1976).

Jim Stanton and Ross Zerchykov, *Overcoming Barriers to School Council Effectiveness* (Boston, Mass.: Institute for Responsive Education, 1979).

Community Impact

Leonard Bornstein, "Deciding to Close a School: Economic or Political Process?" *School Leader* (New Jersey School Boards Association, November-December 1977), pp. 11-13.

Schools and Neighborhood Research Study: Phase One: Executive Summary, Report of the Seattle Public Schools (December 1976).

Tim Weaver, *Preston County Comprehensive Facilities Plan for Consolidating the Schools: Case Against,* available through Boston University, Boston, Mass.

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RELATED IRE PUBLICATIONS

Citizen Action in Education, IRE's three times yearly journal. Contribution: $5.00.

Education for All People! A Grassroots Primer, Ron Walker, et al., 1979 ($3.95).

Opening the Door: Citizen Roles in Educational Collective Bargaining, Irving Hamer, et al., 1979 ($7.50).

Overcoming Barriers to School Council Effectiveness, Jim Stanton, et al., 1979 ($6.50).

Facts for a Change: Citizen Action Research for Better Schools, Bill Burges, 1976 ($5.00).

Facts and Figures: A Layman's Guide to Conducting Surveys, Bill Burges, 1976 ($4.25).

Collecting Evidence: A Layman's Guide to Participant Observation, Joe Ferreira and Bill Burges, 1976 ($2.00).

Words, Pictures, Media: Communication in Educational Politics, Lloyd Prentice, 1976 ($4.00).

Schools Where Parents Make A Difference, ed. Don Davies, 1976 ($3.95).

Federal and State Impact on Citizen Participation in the Schools, Don Davies, et al., 1978 ($7.50).

Resource Guide and Bibliography on School Councils, Jim Stanton, et al., 1978 ($6.00).

School Community Council Information Packets:

- *A Directory of Local, State and National Recourses,* 1978 ($4.00).
- *Rationale and Methods of Increased Participation in Education,* 1978 ($6.00).